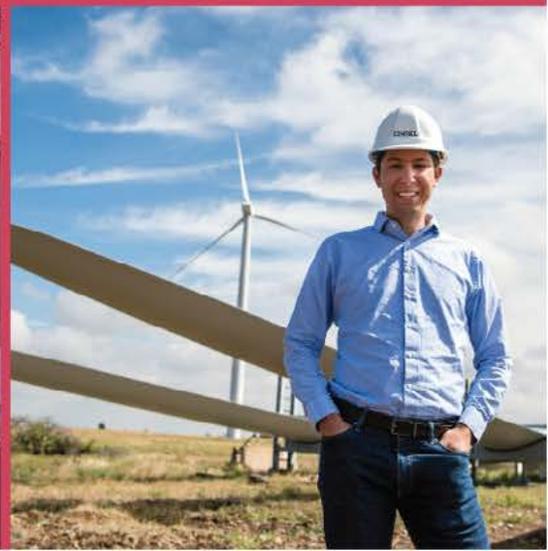




“A State of Immigrants”:

A New Look at the Immigrant Experience in Oregon

Robert Bussel, Editor



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We are deeply indebted to the many people who consented to be interviewed for this report and for their willingness to share their stories and insights.

We dedicate this report to the late Susan Hardwick. A geography professor and immigration scholar at the University of Oregon, Susan played an instrumental role in developing our 2008 report on immigration in Oregon and was deeply committed to the interdisciplinary and participatory approaches embodied in this document. We continue to be inspired by her exemplary work as both a scholar and an advocate and offer this report as a heartfelt tribute to her memory.



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Contributors

John Arroyo

School of Planning, Public Policy, and Management, University of Oregon

Bobbie Bermúdez

College of Education, University of Oregon

Robert Bussel

History Department and Labor Education and Research Center, University of Oregon

Melissa K. Graciosa

School of Planning, Public Policy, and Management, University of Oregon

Calvin G. Hoff

School of Planning, Public Policy, and Management, University of Oregon

Daniel López-Cevallos

Department of Ethnic Studies, Oregon State University

Lola Loustaunau

Department of Sociology and Labor Education and Research Center, University of Oregon

Audrey Lucero

College of Education, University of Oregon

Maggie Mitteis

College of Education, University of Oregon

Jóse W. Meléndez

School of Planning, Public Policy, and Management, University of Oregon

Leah Rausch

School of Planning, Public Policy, and Management, University of Oregon

Alex Renirie

School of Planning, Public Policy, and Management, University of Oregon

Lisha Shrestha

School of Social Work and Research, Portland State University, Executive Director, Division Midway Alliance

Lynn Stephen

Department of Anthropology, University of Oregon

Daniel J. Tichenor

Department of Political Science and Wayne Morse Center for Law and Politics, University of Oregon

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“A State of Immigrants”: A New Look at the Immigrant Experience in Oregon

Introduction

In 2008, a group of scholars from the University of Oregon produced a report titled “Understanding the Immigrant Experience in Oregon.” Noting the dramatic increase in Oregon’s immigrant and refugee population over the previous two decades, the authors sought to broaden public understanding of the immigrant experience in Oregon, document the contributions of immigrants in workplace and community settings, and offer recommendations that would help immigrants become more successfully integrated into the state’s social, economic, and civic life. The report was widely disseminated and generated thoughtful discussion about the vital role of immigrants in Oregon and the need for actions and policies that addressed their needs and interests.

Much has changed in the decade since the publication of our 2008 report. Although immigration has generated social conflict and tension throughout U. S. and Oregon history, with Oregon having its own deeply rooted traditions of white supremacy, racial exclusion, and anti-immigrant sentiment, the tone of public discourse about immigrants shifted dramatically in the years following the 2016 election and the Trump administration’s assumption of power. The administration’s determination to restrict opportunities for immigrants and refugees, highlighted by accelerated construction of a border wall, family separation, sharply increased enforcement activity, attempts to curb asylum seekers, curtailed pathways for legal immigration, and more limited access to government services and benefits, stirred widespread controversy, spread fear throughout immigrant communities, and made immigration one of the defining political issues of our time. Concurrently, the COVID-19 pandemic introduced the concept of “essential work” into our public vocabulary, affirming the crucial role that immigrants play in ensuring our social well-being while exposing the risks and dangers they face and spotlighting the structural and systemic inequalities that affect and often circumscribe their lives.

During the decade since our initial report, Congress did consider comprehensive reforms in the U. S. immigration system. However, heightened political polarization around immigration derailed these efforts, prompting state and local governments and other institutions to fill this vacuum by advancing their own initiatives. These events underscore the need to recognize Oregon’s new status as a “state of immigrants” that has increasingly adopted public policies and community level strategies aimed at helping immigrants and refugees achieve social, civic, cultural and economic integration. According to the Migration Policy Institute, since 1990, Oregon’s foreign-born population in Oregon has increased by 41.7 percent to comprise nearly 10 percent of the state’s total population. Immigrants have made their presence known in multiple arenas –social, economic, cultural, political, civic, and creative– and in a wide swath of urban and rural communities across the state of Oregon. Given these developments, several contributors to the 2008 study, along with additional scholars from the University of Oregon, Oregon State University, and Portland State University, agreed that the timing was right to conduct new research tracing the recent experience of immigrants in Oregon and reviewing how the integration process has unfolded in different settings.

One of our contributors, Lisha Shrestha from Portland State University, notes that immigrant integration is a “dynamic, two-way process” aimed at helping newcomers feel at home and develop a sense of belongingness which enables them to “build relationships, craft identities, and explore new opportunities.” She goes on to observe that in addition to the actions and initiatives taken by immigrants, this two-way process demands contributions from host societies in creating conditions that promote a welcoming atmosphere and a positive integration experience.

In exploring the immigrant experience, the integration process, and the activities of immigrants, communities, and institutions, our contributors assess developments in important arenas such as education, health, politics, civic engagement, work and employment, the operation of the asylum system, and arts and culture. We draw on different methodological approaches: case studies; qualitative data obtained from surveys and interviews; quantitative analysis; and interpretive frameworks derived from disciplines such as political science, anthropology, education, sociology, history, and urban and regional planning. Although our contributors use a variety of tools and methods, several common understandings have influenced their work. Too often, especially amid the harsh anti-immigrant rhetoric and executive actions that have characterized federal policy in recent years, the voices of immigrants have been either obscured or marginalized. In response, we have attempted to elevate the voices of immigrants and feature their stories, perspectives, and reflections as integral parts of our analysis. This approach supports an integration process that secures the rights of newcomers to participate in all facets of Oregon life, the same values reflected in the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation’s “Just Futures Initiative” whose support has helped fund the publication of this research.

Our contributors also agree that there is no monolithic, linear, or universal immigrant story in Oregon; the migration experience is characterized by different journeys, trajectories, and forms of adaptation. And while we appreciate scholars Allan Colburn and S. Karthick Ramakrishnan’s designation of Oregon as a leader in providing a “durable, multifaceted, and meaningful form of state citizenship” for immigrants, we recognize that the process of integration is marked not only by progress and success but also by obstacles, setbacks, and frustrations in a state whose racial and ethnic composition remains predominately white (Colburn and Ramakrishnan, 2021). With this awareness in mind, we hope to account for the broad spectrum of the immigrant experience in Oregon and the ongoing evolution and refinement of the integration process. Our contributors also offer strategic and policy recommendations that we believe would support inclusionary practices and enhance the integration process.

We offer some qualifications regarding the scope and coverage of our research. This project originated prior to the pandemic, and many of our contributors had ambitious research plans that had to be adjusted due to social distancing requirements and other COVID-19 related precautions. In several cases, gaining access to people and data emerged as a challenge, limiting the number of interviews that could be arranged and complicating efforts to gather information from surveys or questionnaires. Our research tends to focus primarily on the experience of Latinx immigrants, a reflection of the scholarly interests of many of our researchers and the significant presence of Latinx immigrants as Oregon’s largest foreign-born group. However, we fully acknowledge the diverse backgrounds of people who have migrated to Oregon as immigrants and refugees, their presence in all regions of the state, and the variety of roles they play in their workplaces, communities, organizations, and other social and civic spaces. We also note that some of our contributors do consider the experiences of

non-Latinx immigrants in their research, and we hope our work will inspire additional studies that account for the many groups of immigrants who make Oregon their home.

Although we understand there are pragmatic reasons for supporting immigrants and appreciating their powerful impact on our social and economic well-being, the contributors to this report also recognize the profound cultural role played by immigrants that is often overlooked. In the words of author and social critic Viet Thanh Nguyen, immigrants “regenerate” both nation and state by calling on us to fulfill our deeper promise and potential. As he wrote in a recent *New York Times* essay, “our superpower should not only be found in our military and our economy. Our superpower should also be our ability to model the possibility of harmony found in diversity, of strength found in difference, of the love of the stranger overcoming the fear of the outsider” (Nguyen, 2021). Omar Rivas, a first-generation immigrant, supermarket meatcutter, and union steward interviewed for this project, elaborated on Nguyen’s observation in reflecting on his own experience as an immigrant who has lived in Oregon for most of his life: “I’m proud of being an immigrant. I’m proud of being who I am, and who I’ve become.” Noting heightened tension around immigration and the skepticism he has sometimes encountered in his small community, Rivas concluded the interview with this observation: “At the end of the day, we’re all humans. And that’s you know, we just got to live together.”

Rivas’s wish embodies the sense of regeneration and hope that immigrants bring to both our nation and our state. We offer our report in a similar spirit as Oregon grapples with the legacy of its often exclusionary past and attempts to embrace the possibilities of an inclusionary future.

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Audrey Lucero, Bobbie Bermúdez
and Maggie Mitteis
College of Education
University of Oregon



Chapter One

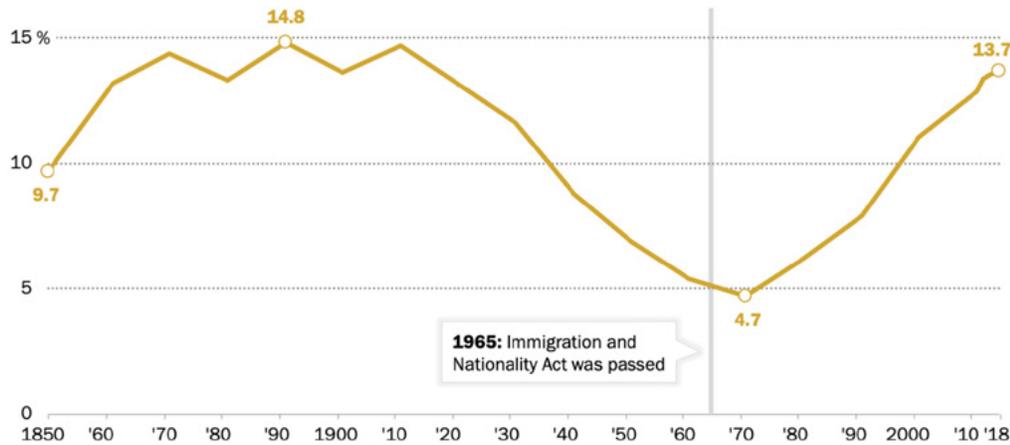
Crossing Borders: The Perspectives of Transnational Students in One Urban Oregon High School

Introduction

As with most stories concerning marginalized groups, this one begins with numbers. According to the United Nations Migration Report (2020), the world population is seeing an influx of migration on a global scale. In 2019, it was estimated that 3.5 percent of the global population, or 272 million individuals, self-identified as migrants (United Nations). The population that chooses to migrate is worth studying because statistics have shown that the majority of individuals live their whole lives in their country of birth (Buddimin, 2020). Overall, while trends of traveling within a country’s borders are substantial, crossing borders is still considered a statistical anomaly.

Immigrant share of U.S. population nears historic high

% of U.S. population that is foreign born



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, “Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-Born Population of the United States: 1850-2000” and Pew Research Center tabulations of 2010-2018 American Community Survey (IPUMS).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

| YEAR | MILLIONS |
|------|----------|
| 1990 | 19.8 |
| 2000 | 31.1 |
| 2010 | 39.9 |
| 2013 | 41.3 |
| 2014 | 42.2 |
| 2015 | 43.2 |
| 2016 | 43.7 |
| 2017 | 44.4 |
| 2018 | 44.8 |

While in 1970 only 4.8 percent of the U.S. population was foreign-born, that figure has tripled to 13.7 percent of the overall current U.S. population (Buddimin, 2020). States such as California have historically been hubs of migration due to proximity to the southern border and labor needs of agricultural business. In fact, two of the cities with the largest international communities in the U.S. are San Jose (37 percent) and Los Angeles

(34 percent) (Florida, 2015). Not surprisingly, neighboring states such as Oregon have also noted an influx of migrants, albeit on a smaller scale. This chapter focuses on high school students in the state of Oregon. U.S. law prohibits public K-12 schools from collecting immigration information on their students due to the landmark 1982 Supreme Court case *Plyler v. Doe*, which extended to undocumented children the right to a public education. This decision was based on the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which prohibits “a state from denying any person within its borders the equal protection of the laws” (Sutton & Stewart, 2013). As a result of this ruling, K-12 educational institutions can neither ask about nor seek to document a student’s immigration status. Therefore, we must rely on national data and other educational statistics to show how the transnational student population in Oregon has changed in the last fifteen years. We use the term “transnational” instead of immigrant in this chapter because it is a broad term that can refer to youth who were born in the U.S. within immigrant families. We further explain the term later in this chapter.

Demographics

Since the 2008 “Understanding the Immigrant Experience in Oregon” report (Bussel, et. al. 2008), the number of international or transnational community members in Oregon has continued to grow. As of 2020, one in every ten Oregon residents identifies as an immigrant (American Immigration Council, 2020). Furthermore, one in every nine Oregon residents is a native-born U.S. citizen with at least one immigrant parent (American Immigration Council, 2020). These numbers make it likely that many children who attend Oregon high schools have a transnational sense of identity. For many transnational youth, “schools are often the sole point of engagement with their new host country” (Bajaj & Bartlett, 2017). In this chapter, we highlight the nuances this diversity brings into the school system.

What is Transnationalism?

Transnationalism is a term that has emerged in response to the changing global context, where immigration and international travel have become more common. This global mobility, which can stem from factors such as economic and political stressors or personal choice, has

reached unprecedented levels in the last decade. A 2017 study found that “two hundred and forty-four million people or 3.3 percent of the world’s population, live outside of their countries of origin” (United Nations Population Fund: Migration). For the purposes of this chapter, we align with scholars Jaffe-Walter and Lee’s (2018) definition of transnationalism, which refers to “the movement of people across borders in the context of globalization.” This phenomenon refers not only to a physical journey but also metaphorical movement back and forth between an individual’s home culture and the new culture. Thus, while transnationalism is related to terms such as “citizen or immigrant,” these immigration terms are malleable and may change over time. Therefore, the term transnational refers to individuals who grow up with a mix of international cultures, traditions and/or languages, regardless of their immigration status at any point in time.

In addition, the concept of transnationalism rejects “traditional notions of assimilation that conceive of acculturation as a linear process of shedding one’s associations with native countries” (Jaffe-Walter & Lee 2018). Rather, it emphasizes “the multi-stranded social relations that link places of origin and settlement” (Basch et al. 1994). In the 21st century, transnational individuals are making a conscious choice to keep their traditions, culture, heritage or native languages alive. Among young people especially, these choices are aided by digital tools such as the internet, free international messaging apps like Whatsapp, and the ease of flights to visit relatives in different countries.

At the center of debates about migration and assimilation are the unspoken questions of ‘who is American’ and ‘what does it mean to become American?’ For transnational high school students these are important questions to consider, since research has shown that children from migrant families, the fastest growing demographic in U.S. educational institutions, rely on schools as a point of contact into a new community (Peguero, 2014). Safe and engaging schools allow these students to feel like they belong while continuing to maintain their multicultural identities (Miranda, 2017).

Understanding the Transnational Student Population in Oregon

We begin by recognizing that terms such as “newcomer” and “emergent bilingual” are commonly used in the K-12 school system to identify students who may have transnational identities. However, any student who identifies as transnational has a nuanced identity. They may identify as newcomer or emergent bilingual or be from families who have been in Oregon for more than a generation. In addition, students with transnational identities vary in country of birth, educational history, race, and social class. In light of this, schools must devise responsive and innovative plans that address their specific educational needs (Ascenzi-Moreno, 2017).

Linguistic diversity is an important aspect of transnationalism, and emergent bilingual is a term that has arisen in recent years to refer to students who know two or more languages through their home and communities, regardless of whether those languages are supported in schools (García et al., 2008). This term represents an important departure from deficit labels like English Learner (EL) or Limited English Proficient (LEP) (García & Kleifgen, 2010). Challenging the notion of static linguistic identities, emergent bilingual intentionally reframes transnational students as constant language learners (García et al., 2008). Nonetheless, the Oregon Department of Education still uses the term EL to describe the emergent bilingual population in K-12 schools. The following charts

Figure 1: Current ELs by Oregon School Districts - 2018-2019

| District Name | Number of Current ELs | Percentage of Current ELs |
|------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| Salem-Keizer | 7,249 | 17.7% |
| Beaverton | 4,966 | 12.3% |
| Portland | 3,756 | 7.8% |
| Hillsboro | 3,290 | 16.2% |
| Reynolds | 2,810 | 25.8% |
| David Douglas | 2,114 | 21.3% |
| Woodburn | 1,808 | 32.5% |
| Nyssa | 358 | 30.1% |
| Umatilla | 391 | 28.6% |
| Jefferson County | 674 | 23.5% |
| Milton-Freewater | 399 | 23.1% |

Figure 2: Most prevalent documented languages of origin among current ELs in Oregon - 2018-19

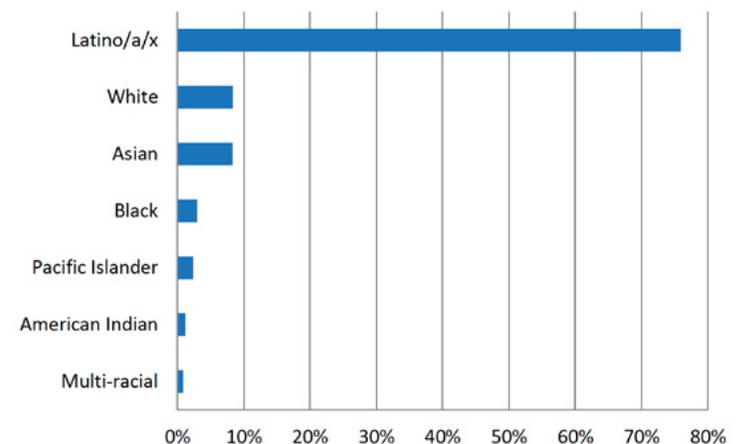
| Language | Number of ELs with this Language | Percentage of ELs with this Language |
|-------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Spanish | 40,411 | 79.0% |
| Russian | 1,564 | 3.1% |
| Vietnamese | 1,114 | 2.2% |
| Chinese | 1,091 | 2.1% |
| Arabic | 964 | 1.9% |
| English | 833 | 1.6% |
| Somali | 700 | 1.4% |
| “Other languages” | 685 | 1.3% |
| Chukese | 623 | 1.2% |
| Ukrainian | 402 | .08% |
| Marshallese | 372 | .07% |
| Japanese | 348 | .07% |
| Mayan languages | 306 | .06% |
| Korean | 299 | .06% |

Figures 1 and 2 are from the Oregon Department of Education (2020). *English Language Learners in Oregon Report 2018-2019*.

(Figure 1 and Figure 2) document the number of current ELs by Oregon school districts and also the most prevalent languages as of the 2018-2019 school year.

In addition to linguistic diversity, Oregon’s K-12 student population has also featured a rise in students of color. Oregon is a historically predominantly white state, as reported by the U.S. Census (2019), which finds that 86.7 percent of Oregon residents identify as white. Regardless, the Latino population has been growing and is currently the largest ethnic group among Oregon’s diverse K-12 stu-

Figure 3: Diverse Student Populations



dent population (Figure 3). Because of this diversification, the Oregon Department of Education is currently spearheading new initiatives that could specifically support and benefit these transnational students.

Oregon's Student Success Act (SSA)

To address achievement issues among students in Oregon, in 2019 the legislature passed House Bill 3427, commonly referred to as the Student Success Act (SSA). This act created a \$2 billion investment account to be used over two years to meet two primary goals (Oregon Department of Education, 2019). The first goal is to better meet the mental and behavioral health needs of children in early learning and K-12 environments. The second goal is to reduce academic disparities among groups who have historically experienced fewer opportunities for success, including children of color and emergent bilingual students.

To access this money, districts and public charter schools applied through a non-competitive grant process, outlining how they would use the funds to meet the SSA goals. Allowable ways to spend the money include reducing class size, increasing instructional time, providing support for social and emotional learning, and expanding culturally responsive curriculum and instruction. As part of the SSA, the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) also developed a "Latino/a/x Student Success Plan" to specifically address the inequities experienced by Latino youth in Oregon schools. This is not surprising as Spanish-speaking emergent bilinguals total 40,411 students in the state of Oregon, or 79 percent of all emergent bilingual students in the state (see Figure 2).

Recently, ODE acknowledged that the COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the existing discrepancies in lack of access to technology, multilingual materials, and community supports that create challenges for many in the Latinx community. Since Latinx individuals make up the majority of the immigrant population in the state, it is heartening that ODE and House Bill 3427 have made their academic success a central concern as we enter a new decade. The unpredictable nature of the COVID-19 pandemic offers yet another reason why it is essential to look at minoritized communities like transnational students and document their unique lived experiences in Oregon high schools.

The Importance of Student Perspectives

Understandably, much of the research that has been conducted about immigrant and transnational youth and adolescents has focused on academic achievement. In addition, most of this work has been descriptive in nature. More recently, scholars have advocated shifting from just describing academic achievement to considering adaptation and school experiences from the perspective of students (Olivares-Orellana, 2020; Sánchez, 2007; Taira, 2019). In other words, there is a push to move beyond school language and literacy practices to recognize students' "rich cultural repertoires, their agency as historical actors, and their participation in literacies that span geographical boundaries" (Taira, 2019, p. 75). Although most of this research has been conducted outside of Oregon, educators in Oregon can also benefit by learning from the unique experiences of the immigrant and transnational youth they work with through hearing their stories and allowing their assumptions to be challenged.

The need for student voices is especially pronounced in light of the long history of scholarship on assimilation, which proposed that there are various paths to adaptation in a new country, some of which are considered positive ("upward") and involve choosing certain aspects of the culture to engage, while rejecting others ("selective") (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). In these traditional conceptions of assimilation, there is no room for movement – literal or metaphorical – across cultures and communities. Better, perhaps, would be an acknowledgment of the dynamic nature of the transnationalism that makes it possible for many high schoolers in Oregon to both maintain the values, traditions and language practices of their communities and incorporate aspects of the receiving community and educational system (Sánchez & Kasun, 2012).

Soliciting the perspective of youth holds the potential to better inform educators about their conceptions of citizenship and what it means to be active members of their communities. Some researchers have argued that student participation in two (or more) distinct cultural spaces "provides them experiences, knowledge, and a greater understanding of what it means to be a global citizen—someone with empathies and insights about membership in a community that transcend local and nation-state

boundaries” (Sánchez, 2007, p. 503). Although it can be challenging for youth to navigate these spaces, especially during politically fraught times, young people can develop complex understandings of what it means to be part of a community (Dyrness & Abu El-Haj, 2019). Indeed, their understanding may be more sophisticated than those of their monocultural classmates (Sánchez & Kasun, 2012). Accordingly, rather than considering ongoing identification with home cultures a threat, we should consider it an asset to students’ social and academic futures in this country.

What programs, supports or overall systems need to change?

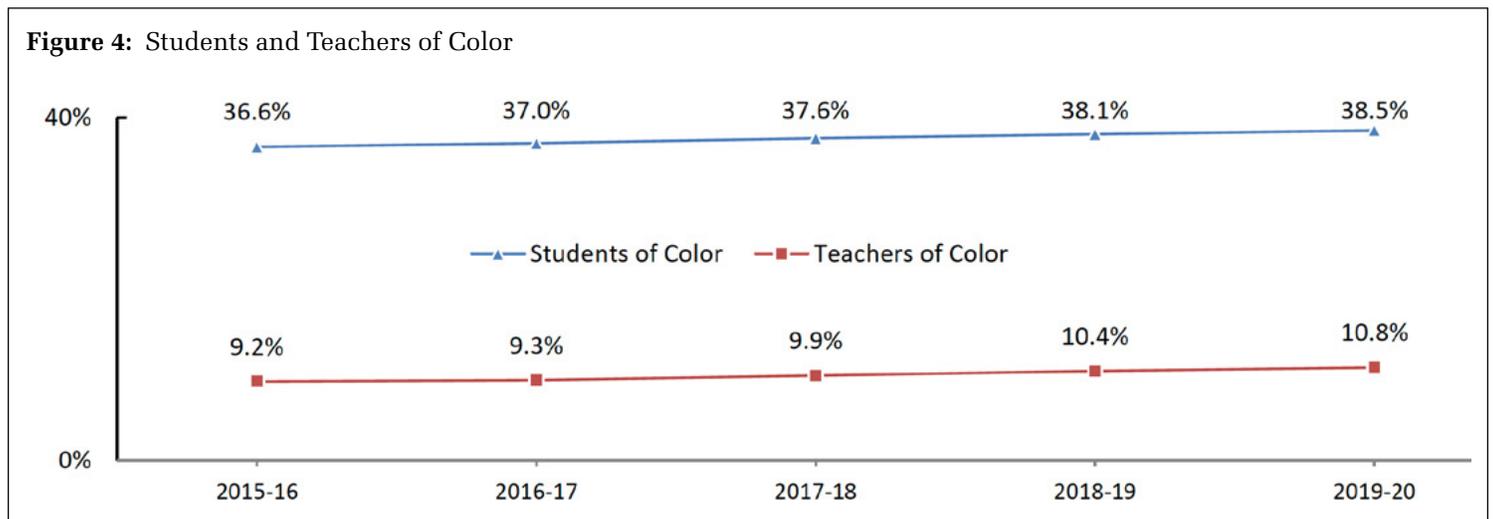
As Oregon’s student population continues to diversify, teachers can play a central role in creating classroom communities that better serve transnational students’ life experiences, viewing cultural and linguistic diversity as assets rather than challenges.

Currently, a majority of English language classrooms are language-learning centric, offering little or no attention to the transnational experience, sociopolitical identities, or daily requirements of immigrant adaptation (Oikonomidoy, 2011; Rodriguez et al., 2018). Instead, the curricular structure of EL and bilingual programs focuses on rapid English acquisition and scholastic assimilation, with little consideration given to bilingualism (Jaffe-Walter & Lee, 2018) or students’ complex identities.

Though all teachers can function as advocates for students with transnational and immigrant backgrounds, some would prefer to maintain a conceptual separation between students’ experiences, knowledge of immigrants’ legal statuses, and the classroom (Jaffe-Walter & Lee, 2018). In fact, teachers’ lack of understanding of the immigrant experience directly impedes their ability to advocate for transnational students.

An asset-based approach to schooling and transnational students—one that takes a more positive view of these identities and centers these experiences—leads to more positive self-identifications and less discriminatory treatment from both peers and teachers (Brown and Chu, 2012; Jaffe-Walter & Lee, 2018). Schools must rethink the assumption that it is their responsibility to transform students into assimilated U.S. citizens and for teachers to function as politically neutral entities (Bajaj & Bartlett, 2017; Levinson, 2005, 2011; Levinson & Stevick, 2007). It is imperative that teacher preparation programs move beyond a focus on language acquisition.

Social belongingness refers to a basic human emotional and psychological need for perceiving acceptance in a social group or setting (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Leary & Baumeister, 2000). When students lack meaningful relationships with their classmates, teachers, or mentors, they believe they have no place at school, wherein they see themselves as different from the dominant society and can experience feelings of isolation (Ryan & Dogbey, 2012).



From Oregon Department of Education (2020). *Oregon Statewide Report Card 2019-2020*, p. 8.

“teachers (and teacher preparation programs) who engage multiculturalism in their teaching must acknowledge and be supported through training about the different ways that immigration discourse and policy enactments govern the everyday lives of newcomers.”

Rodriguez et al., 2018, p. 14

Social belongingness provides a useful lens for evaluating the unique position of transnational students. The shared experience of migration and resettlement, in combination with a common racial and/or ethnic background, can serve as a catalyst for social relationships among students and aid with adjustment difficulties (Georgiades et al., 2013). Adolescents may associate the racial and ethnic make-up of a school with a core feeling of belongingness, and increased opportunities to affiliate with peers can lead to feelings of acceptance. In many Oregon schools, this necessary peer group often is not robust enough to build strong social networks as students of color remain the minority and teachers of color are an even smaller subgroup.

Furthermore, according to the 2019-2020 Oregon State-wide Report Card (Oregon Department of Education, 2020), the population of students and teachers of color continues to grow at proportional rates, leaving the gap between these populations essentially fixed (Figure 4). Given these discrepancies, schools must consider other means of instilling feelings of belongingness for students outside of focusing on shared experiences or ethnic and cultural identities. Instigating belongingness within the school community for transnational students is a responsibility for all teachers, not just those of color.

Pilot Study Findings

In January 2021, we conducted a small-scale pilot study of transnational high schoolers’ experiences at an international school in the Portland metro area. In doing so, we hoped to better understand some of the ways the school supported students’ transnational identities, cultural and linguistic practices, and sense of belongingness. Given the circumstances constraining in-person data collection due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we conducted virtual interviews using the Nearpod and Flipgrid apps, enabling

Figure 5: Tell us where your parents or grandparents are from (N=33)

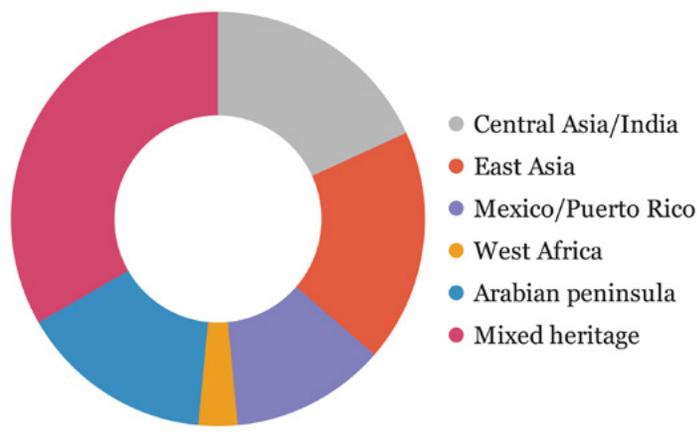
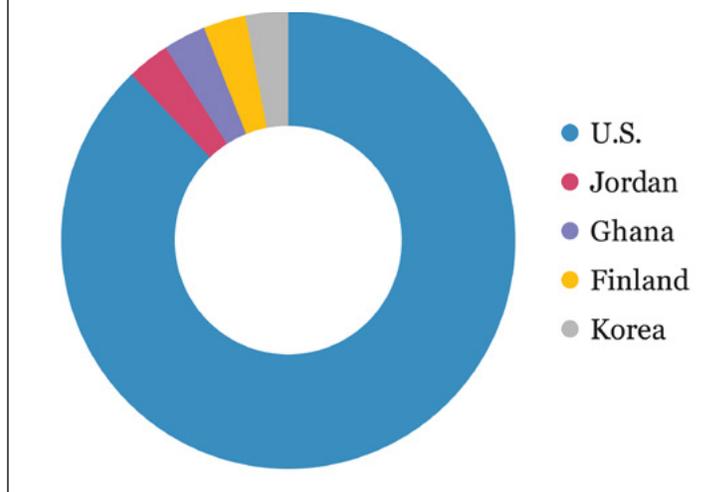


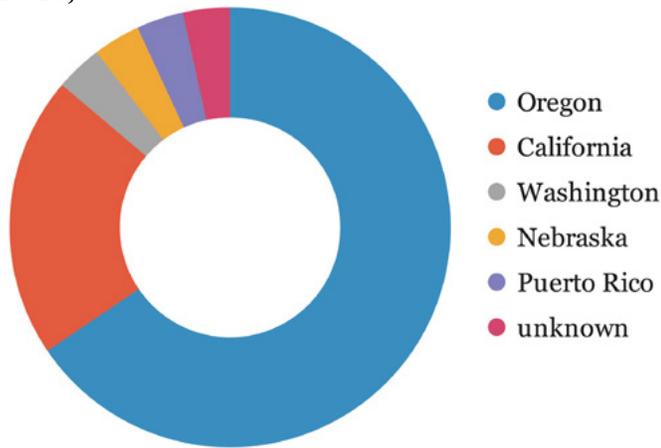
Figure 6: Where were you born? (N=33)



participants to respond to interview questions in writing or through audio or video. Thirty-three students ages 14-18 submitted responses to the platform. A majority of students were born in the United States (n = 29), and of those, 19 were born in Oregon (Figures 6 and 7). Only four participants were born outside the United States. However, this fact should not obscure the diversity of the sample. Participants’ families came from all over the world and spoke numerous heritage languages (Figure 5).

The charts show the diversity of heritages and languages represented in this small sample. In addition to the places of parental origin shown above, those who expressed mixed heritage had parents from two different countries, including the Philippines, Russia, Germany, and Croa-

Figure 7: If you were born in the U.S., which state? (N=29)



tia. This mixed heritage group actually comprised the largest percent of participants (34 percent). Interestingly, although data from the Oregon Department of Education shows that Latinx children make up the largest share of racial and ethnic minorities in K-12 schools statewide, this was not the case in this sample. This was likely because this school is a small public option middle/high school that requires an application, in addition to being located in the most multicultural urban area in the state. Therefore, an important caveat to these findings is that the experiences of these participants may not be fully representative of other transnational teenagers around the state. However, these findings provide a roadmap for how school administrators and teachers can support and even celebrate students' transnational identities and enable feelings of belongingness.

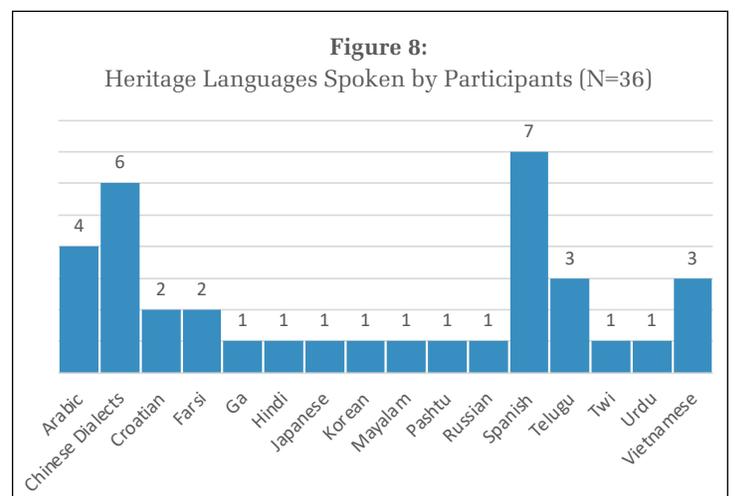
Findings from this exploratory study can provide some compelling information about what this school is doing well that can inform other Oregon schools who serve children from immigrant and transnational families. One reason this school can serve as an example is that, like the majority of schools in Oregon, the student population is considerably less white (40 percent) than the teacher population (88 percent) (Oregon Department of Education, 2020). Further, 27 percent of students were or had been English Learners at some point in their education, which was higher than the overall state level of 17.9 percent (Oregon Department of Education, 2020). Thus, administrators and teachers at this school likely faced challenges in serving their diverse student population that mirror those experienced by schools across the state.

From the interviews, it was clear that many students felt that teachers worked hard to develop caring relationships with them and facilitated a safe and supportive environment (Noguera, 2019). Teachers did this by showing genuine interest in students' cultures and communities and guiding frequent conversations about the immigrant experience. As an 18-year old participant whose parents were born in Vietnam explained:

“We often have conversations about different cultures and perspectives, especially during culture week where people from our community are invited to speak about their culture and what they have experienced.”

The practice of regularly having students and community members share their perspectives and experiences can support positive associations with immigration and encourage young people to maintain transnational connections.

By enabling positive associations both in the classroom and beyond, teachers and administrators can also build a school community in which languages other than English are seen as assets rather than deficits, even when they can't be fluent in all of the languages represented at any given school. The variety of the heritage languages spoken in the homes of these participants presented both challenges and opportunities at this school. More than 40 languages were spoken in the school (Oregon Department of Education, 2020), and 36 languages were spoken by the 33 participants in this study alone (Figure 8). However, participants expressed appreciation for the ways in which



teachers worked to make content accessible and celebrate languages.

As one 14-year-old participant whose mother was from the Philippines noted:

“Teachers and administration support transnational students through helping them feel more comfortable in the school environment, through translating or speaking to them in their native language, and by introducing them to veteran students who will help them around the school.”

This quote illustrates the multilayered ways in which this international urban high school worked to build community both between teachers and students and also among students themselves, creating networks in which students feel supported and accepted. Practices like these can help transnational students develop a sense of belongingness that leads to better academic and social outcomes (Georgiades et al., 2013). This may be especially important in states like Oregon, which is less diverse than many other states.

The above quote also highlights the importance of language in the school experiences of transnational students. Indeed, in their qualitative responses to the questions we asked about the use of and identification with heritage languages, students expressed deep connections to these languages. It may seem unexpected that even though nearly 90 percent of these youth were born in the U.S., all but one of them reported regularly speaking a language other than English in their home or community. Some of the ways in which they described the importance of heritage languages in their lives affirmed that language is about much more than communication for them:

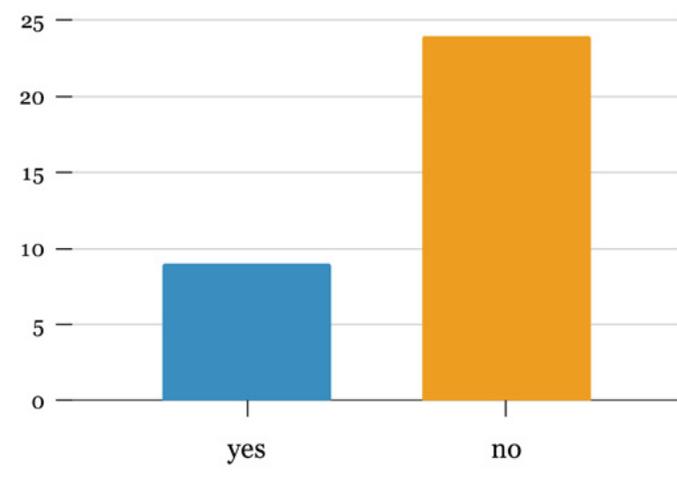
“My language is part of me because it helps me connect with where I come from.”

18 year-old Farsi speaker

“Arabic is important to me because it is the language of the holy Quran, that is an important part of my religion.”

18 year-old Arabic speaker

Figure 9: Have you ever felt singled out because of your race/ethnicity or the languages you speak while on school grounds? (N = 33)



“Language has helped me build many relationships that I wouldn’t have been able to build if I weren’t able to speak the languages I do”

15 year-old Telugu & Hindi speaker

“Language feels like the motherland, it feels like a safe place to interact with people.”

17 year-old Vietnamese speaker

Scholars have pointed out that the concept of transnationalism encompasses the flow of ideas, emotions, and relationships that move across national borders even a generation or two after immigrant families settle (Jaffe-Walter & Lee, 2018). As attested to by these student reflections, language plays a major role in this transnational flow.

Of course, even in an international school like this one, it is not possible for teachers and staff to converse in all of the many languages spoken by the students. Nonetheless, showing respect for language diversity and inviting students to use their linguistic resources in ways that make sense for them can go a long way, aiding in students feeling acceptance as members of the school community. Student responses demonstrate that this school is very successful in achieving that.

Figure 9 shows that when we asked participants whether they had felt singled out due to their race/ethnicity or language use, twenty-three said they had not, while nine said they had. Some of the ways that students described feeling singled out encompassed issues of not feeling ‘ethnic enough’ or conforming to the pressures of the model minority stereotype:

“Two years ago in middle school when someone told me I (had) like a white person name, that it wasn’t Mexican enough and I was kind of like ‘not all of us are named Maria.’ Like not all of us have a straight up Hispanic name, you know.”

14 year-old whose parents are from Mexico

“I don’t think I’ve ever been directly singled out as an individual because of my race but there’s this huge stereotype surrounding Asian people that we’re supposed to be naturally smarter than a lot of other people ... and this causes a lot of people to set really high expectations for me before they even really know me, and it’s always ... just really disappointing to not be able to fulfill or exceed those expectations.”

14 year-old biracial student whose parents are from China and Germany

It is important to note that most of the students who described negative experiences explained that they occurred in middle school (at a different school). Overall, the majority of students surveyed (73 percent) noted positive experiences, such as this biracial 16 year-old, whose parents are from Russia and China: “Now that I go to (this school) it really helps because they ... push you to be confident in yourself and embrace your identity.” This quote aligns with literature that suggests educators in schools can do more to ensure that all transnational students feel a strong sense of belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Leary & Baumeister, 2000).

Recommendations for Educational Institutions

These findings complement much of the existing literature on ways to support students cited earlier. Therefore, we end this chapter with some recommendations for Oregon K-12 schools. Given the strong likelihood that youth from immigrant families have transnational identities, teachers and other school personnel should support the development of those identities and recognize the benefits they hold. This will require teachers to better understand the bi- (or multi-) cultural nature of youth’s daily experiences and how these experiences can be drawn upon to facilitate school belonging and achievement (Lash, 2018). This can be as simple as teachers making an effort to learn about their students’ lives outside the classroom, especially in the case of families and communities whose language, traditions and aspirations may not be visible to the predominantly white K-12 teaching force in Oregon. Transnational practices can be especially pronounced in out-of-school digital literacy practices, which include frequent social media communication across national boundaries. Such engagement enables youth to stay in touch with family and loved ones in their home countries, and also allows for the creation of new friendships and communities, further connecting youth to both of the cultures they identify with.

From an educational perspective, there is evidence that transnational high schoolers enact civic participation through diverse activities such as reading, critiquing, and sharing local and international news on social media platforms (Marchi, 2017; Watson & Knight-Manuel, 2017). Teachers can support these activities by facilitating digital engagement with current events and issues to build on students’ developing transnational identities. Indeed, transnational students can act as leaders in their classrooms when it comes to enriching their monocultural peers’ understanding of how local and national events can be seen from a broader global perspective (Sánchez & Kasun, 2012). However, we should not take as a given that students will be able to do this on their own; teachers have a responsibility to act as facilitators – and partners – in this work (Olivares-Orellana, 2020), potentially creating a space that enables transnational students to share their experiences and perspectives.

Specifically, Oregon high schools can be places in which all students learn to expand their notions of citizenship and critically engage with issues related to both historical and contemporary migration. Examples of important issues to discuss include “global power relations, unequal positioning in the larger political economy, and the underlying causes of migration and differentiated access to resettlement” (Bajaj et al., 2017, p. 271). The fact that transnational students are affected by these realities on a daily basis and have direct, personal experiences with these issues makes this kind of instruction both timely and urgent.

For example, schools can support transnational students by directly addressing negative stereotypes associated with immigrants and refugees—especially those with undocumented statuses—and offering vulnerable students compassion and empathy (Noguera, 2019). Through student-teacher relationships and an openness to both understanding and supporting transnational identities, schools can facilitate belongingness for students.



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Daniel López-Cevallos
Department of Ethnic Studies
Oregon State University



Chapter Two

Immigrant Health Issues

As the immigrant (foreign-born)¹ population in Oregon has grown over the past three decades from 4.9 percent in 1990 to 8.5 percent in 2000 to 9.7 percent in 2019 (Migration Policy Institute, 2019), both in and out-of-state voices have raised concerns about the growing human and financial resources needed to provide adequate health and other social services to this important segment of our population. The past few years in particular have seen a renewed effort, both in public and private circles, to perpetuate the myth of immigrants “underservingly” receiving more in health and social benefits than what they contribute to the system. Such perceptions have indeed moved beyond words and into policy changes. The most recent example is the “public charge” ruling released in 2019 by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. While use of public benefits is supposed to be one of several considerations, the change granted immigration officials broader powers to determine if a person’s circumstances may make them likely to depend on governmental aid (External Relations Division, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated such perceptions while acknowledging that a significant number of “essential” sectors rely heavily on immigrant, low-income and people of color labor. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze immigrants’ access to health care and other social services systems and its impact on family and community well-being. The first section describes the immigrant population and offers a social justice perspective to structure our discussion of immigration and safety net utilization. The second section analyzes the immigration and health policy environment, including the contentious perception of immigrants as a burden to the public social welfare system, in assessing the capacity of these systems to serve immigrant Oregonians. The third and final section summarizes findings and presents recommendations on pending issues moving forward.

1. A portrait of the foreign-born population and health outcomes

Employers across numerous sectors (agriculture, food processing, lodging, restaurants) in Oregon depend on immigrant laborers. These jobs often pay low wages, rarely offer health benefits, and are exposed to higher occupational risks (Wallace, Castaneda, Guendelman, Padilla-Frausto, & Felt, 2007), food insecurity (Farmworker Housing Development Corporation, 2009), and greater mortality indices (Vega, Rodriguez, & Gruskin, 2009). A survey of farmworker families living in housing provided by the Farmworker Housing Development Corporation (FHDC) in Woodburn at the core of the agricultural area of the mid-Willamette Valley found that the median household income for FHDC residents was under \$16,000 (Farm Worker Housing Development Corporation, 2009). In contrast, data from the 2015-2016 National Agricultural Workers Survey released in 2018 showed that agricultural workers’ annual wages ranged from \$17,500-\$20,000 (Hernandez & Gabbard, 2018), well below the federal poverty level of \$24,300 for a family of four (Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, 2016).

Table 1. Selected Characteristics of Foreign-Born and US-born Oregonians compared to the United States overall, 2019.

| <i>(%, unless otherwise noted)</i> | Oregon | | United States | |
|--|--------------|----------|---------------|-----------|
| | Foreign-born | US-born | Foreign-born | US-born |
| Population | | | | |
| Number (thousands) | 410,5 | 3,807,2 | 44,932,9 | 283,306,6 |
| % | 9.7 | 90.3 | 13.7 | 86.3 |
| % change: 2000-2019 | 41.7 | 21.6 | 44.4 | 13.2 |
| Gender (Female) | 50.0 | 50.5 | 51.8 | 50.6 |
| Age Groups | | | | |
| Younger than 5 | 0.7 | 5.8 | 0.7 | 6.7 |
| 5-17 | 5.9 | 16.2 | 5.0 | 18.1 |
| 18-64 | 79.2 | 59.4 | 77.6 | 58.7 |
| 65 and older | 14.2 | 18.6 | 16.7 | 16.4 |
| Educational Attainment (ages 25 and older) | | | | |
| Less than high school diploma | 27.5 | 6.1 | 26.3 | 8.2 |
| High school diploma or equivalent | 19.4 | 23.5 | 22.3 | 27.9 |
| Some college | 20.8 | 35.6 | 18.7 | 30.7 |
| Bachelor's degree | 16.8 | 21.6 | 18.5 | 20.7 |
| Graduate or professional degree | 15.5 | 13.3 | 14.2 | 12.5 |
| Unemployment rate (civilians ages 16 and older) | 3.2 | 5.3 | 3.6 | 4.7 |
| Median Household Income (in dollars) | \$65,159 | \$67,261 | \$63,550 | \$66,040 |
| Persons in Poverty | | | | |
| Below 100% of the poverty level | 14.5 | 11.0 | 13.7 | 12.1 |
| 100-199% of the poverty level | 19.1 | 16.0 | 19.9 | 16.1 |
| At or above 200% of the poverty level | 66.4 | 73.0 | 66.4 | 71.8 |
| Citizenship | | | | |
| Naturalized citizens | 48.1 | --- | 51.6 | --- |
| Non-citizens | 51.9 | --- | 48.4 | --- |
| Language (ages 5 and older) | | | | |
| Speaks only English | 19.3 | 91.9 | 16.4 | 88.5 |
| Speaks English "very well" | 39.2 | 7.2 | 37.1 | 9.8 |
| Speaks English less than "very well" | 41.5 | 1.0 | 46.4 | 1.8 |
| Region of Birth (excluding born at sea) | | | | |
| Born in Africa | 4.2 | --- | 5.5 | --- |
| Born in Asia | 33.9 | --- | 31.4 | --- |
| Born in Europe | 13.5 | --- | 10.4 | --- |
| Born in Latin America (South America, Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean) | 42.6 | --- | 50.3 | --- |
| Mexico | 33.7 | --- | 24.3 | --- |
| Other in Latin America | 8.9 | --- | 26.0 | --- |
| Born in Northern America (Canada, Bermuda, Greenland, and St. Pierre and Miquelon) | 3.7 | --- | 1.8 | --- |
| Born in Oceania | 2.1 | --- | 0.7 | --- |

Source: Migration Policy Institute tabulations of the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) 2019 data file: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/demographics/OR/US>

Table 1 provides a brief profile of the foreign-born compared to the US-born population in Oregon along with similar figures for the United States overall in 2019. The foreign-born comprised less than 10 percent of the Oregon population compared to 13.7 percent of the US population. A majority of the foreign-born population is of working-age (18 – 64 years old) in both Oregon (79.2 percent) and the US (77.6 percent), and while the US-born follows a similar pattern, the share of the population is comparatively smaller both in Oregon (59.4 percent) and the US (58.7 percent). Interestingly, while immigrants in Oregon come primarily from Latin America (42.6 percent), over a third come from Asia (33.9 percent). Also, foreign-born Oregonians are more likely to be married (61.5 percent), compared to US-born Oregonians (46.7 percent).

In terms of educational attainment, while immigrant Oregonians are overrepresented at the less than high school level (27.5 percent vs 6.1 percent among US-born), they hold more graduate or professional degrees than those who are U. S.-born (15.5 percent vs. 13.3 percent among US-born). Unemployment rates are lower among immigrants in Oregon (3.2 percent vs. 5.3 percent among

US-born), as is their annual household income (\$65,159 vs. \$67,261 among US-born). A relatively larger share of foreign-born Oregonians lives below 100 percent of the federal poverty level (14.5 percent vs 11 percent among US-born). This inequality has considerable implications for the provision of health and other social services in Oregon. Undocumented immigrants may be in a particularly difficult situation because they do not qualify for public services, except for Emergency Medicaid (or emergency room visits), while green-card holders still cannot access these services for their first five years of permanent residency.

Nearly one in ten immigrant families in the nation can be classified as mixed status, in which one or both parents are noncitizens and one or more children are citizens (Fix & Zimmermann, 2001). More than 25 percent of children under the age of six live in families with one or more undocumented parents. In 2019, 22.3 percent of children in Oregon had one or more foreign-born parents (Migration Policy Institute, 2019). In the predominantly anti-immigrant climate of the past few years, these parents are likely reluctant to approach public agencies seeking services for their US-born children. Barriers to accessing



Photo: Getty/Brent Stirton

Table 2. Selected Characteristics of Foreign-Born, US-Born and US-Born Children With at Least One Foreign -Born Parent, Oregon & United States, 2019.

| (%) | Oregon | | | United States | | |
|---|-----------------------|------------------|---|-----------------------|------------------|---|
| | Foreign-born children | US-born children | US-born children with 1+ foreign-born parent(s) | Foreign-born children | US-born children | US-born children with 1+ foreign-born parent(s) |
| Two-parent families | 84.2 | 78.6 | 86.5 | 77.2 | 72.9 | 82.2 |
| Household owns home | 39.5 | 63.0 | 53.3 | 38.1 | 62.7 | 53.4 |
| One or more foreign-born parents in US 15 years or more, none fewer than 15 | 7.4 | 14.4 | 60.2 | 13.7 | 15.2 | 58.4 |
| Bilingual | 53.0 | 15.6 | 58.3 | 49.4 | 16.9 | 55.3 |
| At least one Limited English Proficient parent | 67.1 | 12.4 | 56.2 | 65.6 | 13.7 | 53.8 |
| All parents have less than a high school education | 29.6 | 7.5 | 24.7 | 20.0 | 8.4 | 19.4 |
| At least one parent has a four-year college degree or more | 43.8 | 43.0 | 34.4 | 44.6 | 41.5 | 38.1 |
| Family that is low income | 48.7 | 33.3 | 45.1 | 50.2 | 37.1 | 45.6 |
| Low-income families with substantial work hours | 36.5 | 25.9 | 40.2 | 39.9 | 28.6 | 39.3 |
| Household receiving food stamps (SNAP) | 30.6 | 23.2 | 27.7 | 20.0 | 20.6 | 20.5 |

Source: Data from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) datasets, 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) as tabulated by The Urban Institute Children of Immigrants Data Tool: <https://children-of-immigrants-explorer.urban.org/pages.cfm>.



Photo: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service

services include misconceptions regarding immigration law or as mentioned earlier, actual changes to policy such as the “public charge,” stigma and discrimination, lack of language supports, and for those with undocumented family members, fear of deportation and family separation (Chavez, 2007; Holcomb, Tumlin, Koralek, Capps, & Zuberi, 2003). It is no surprise then, that in spite of their comparatively higher poverty rates, children of immigrants tend to utilize fewer public benefits than other children (Capps, Fix, Ost, Reardon-Anderson, & Passel, 2005).

Across the country, children of immigrants under six years of age are more likely to live in two-parent families (Fix & Zimmermann, 2001). Although they are twice as likely to live in low-income families, they less often live in families with two working parents (i.e., one of the parents stays at home with the children). Young children of immigrants are more likely to have parents with limited English proficiency. Despite their comparative social and economic disadvantage, young children of immigrants also use fewer benefits. Although they receive less Food Stamps and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) than other low-income children, they are more likely to be poor and to experience food and housing-related hardship (Capps et al., 2005). Table 2 provides an overview of selected characteristics of foreign-born children, US-born children, and U.S.-born children with at least one foreign-born parent.

A majority of both foreign-born and US-born children with at least one foreign-born parent live in two-parent families, 84 percent and 86.5 percent, compared to 78.6 percent for all US-born children. US-born children are more likely to live in homeowner households compared to foreign-born children. Interestingly, 60.2 percent of US-born children in Oregon had a foreign-born parent living in the US for 15 years or more. Over half of both foreign-born children and US-born children with at least one foreign-born parent were bilingual compared to 16 percent among US-born children overall. While these two groups had a larger share of parents with less than a high school education, they also had comparatively more parents with a four-year college degree or more.

On the other hand, more foreign-born children and US-born children with at least one foreign-born parent lived in low-income families with substantial work hours (i.e., if any adult reports at least 1,800 hours of work in the prior

year, which is about 35 hours of work a week for 52 weeks per year). While about half of these families were low-income working families, their use of food stamps (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP) was not significantly higher than that of U.S.-born children in the United States. In Oregon, however, households with foreign-born children had the highest use of food stamps of all groups (30.6 percent). Institutional limitations such as the negative context of reception and a lack of support programs may inhibit these children’s ability to succeed (Portes & Fernandez-Kelly, 2008). Nevertheless, these children are already contributing enormously to their families, schools, and communities. In return, we must do better to support them and their families (Orellana, 2001).

Compared to the US-born, foreign-born children or US-born children with foreign-born parents are less likely to be insured, to have a usual source of care for acute or chronic conditions, or to access preventive health services (Weathers, Novak, Sastry, & Norton, 2008). Irrespective of ethnicity or immigration status, the lack of affordable health insurance coverage is one of the main reasons for being uninsured. While most of the uninsured in the US are citizens (76 percent of the about 28 million uninsured non-elderly adults), 23 percent of documented immigrants were uninsured (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2020). Children in refugee immigrant families, however, do receive Medicaid. Having Medicaid or another form of insurance greatly increases the probability that a child will receive health care services. Recent changes to immigration policy (e.g., public charge) have prompted fears among immigrant families about their children participating in Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), and previous policy changes resulting from welfare and immigration reforms have increased food insecurity (Van Hook & Balistreri, 2006) and reduced insurance coverage among immigrant children (Brown, Wyn, Yu, Valenzuela, & Dong, 1999; Kaushal & Kaestner, 2005).

2. Immigrants, access to care, and health policy environment

A health equity approach

The socio-ecological framework (Paat, 2013) applied to immigrant communities emphasizes the important influence of social context (e.g., social supports, institutions),

social and environmental factors, and public policies over individual behaviors and outcomes. Consequently, health and social interventions focus on reducing or eliminating the causes of unequal burden and outcomes from a societal, policy, and environmental (not individualistic) perspective. In other words, if health (and health care) is a common (community) good, then all residents of a nation (community) agree on a social contract to protect the health of all individuals, families, and communities including immigrants and locals alike. Such framing contrasts with voices that argue for less public support services for immigrants (and more broadly for low-income families) and more “individual” (bootstraps) responsibility. Figure 1 provides an example of a socio-ecological approach that my colleagues at Benton County Health Services and I have used in previous presentations with Spanish-speaking communities in the mid-Willamette Valley.



Figure 1. Socioecological model used in community health efforts with Spanish-speaking participants (Benton County Health Services, 2010).

The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and the work of John Rawls and Amartya Sen, among others, provide an ethical framework for guiding more equitable approaches to health (Braveman & Gruskin, 2003). Distributive justice is concerned with the equitable distribution of societal resources, giving priority to improving the situation of the most disadvantaged (Rawls, 1985). Health and education are fundamental indicators of human capability which in turn allow people to develop, achieving a higher quality of life that includes but is not limited

to economic well-being (Sen, 1999). In the early 1990s, Margaret Whitehead, then a consultant with the World Health Organization, wrote that “equity in health implies that ideally everyone should have a fair opportunity to attain their full health potential, and more pragmatically, that no one should be disadvantaged from achieving this potential” (Whitehead, 1990).

Exposure to unhealthy, stressful living and working conditions, inadequate access to essential health and other social services, and limited social mobility contribute towards health disparities/inequities (Whitehead, 1990). In the absence or the acknowledgement of such context, our response to social issues such as limited access to health care or food insecurity tends to focus on individualized approaches (i.e., teaching people skills to beat the odds), without pointing to collective or policy approaches to undo the structural barriers that prevent individuals and communities from living healthy lives in the first place. In the long run it makes more sense to change the odds (i.e., change social conditions), which will require power (decision-making; economic) rather than simply greater information or knowledge (Wallack, 1994).

From a social justice perspective, the analysis of access and utilization of social services must consider various sources of vulnerability or “burdens.” Both immigrant and non-immigrant low-income families in the United States share many burdens such as poverty, limited social mobility and poorer health outcomes (Marmot & Bell, 2009; Wallace, Young, Rodríguez, & Brindis, 2018). In addition to these common factors, immigration status, limited English proficiency, residential location, stigma and marginalization are additional burdens immigrant families bear on a daily basis (Derose, Escarce, & Lurie, 2007), and it is up to our society as a whole to address these unfair burdens.

Immigrants are less likely than U.S. citizens to receive preventive health services (Pitkin Derose, Bahney, Lurie, & Escarce, 2009). Moreover, foreign-born adults and their children are unlikely to have private health insurance, or a usual source of care for their health care needs (Livingston, Minushkin, & Cohn, 2008). Previous research has shown that undocumented immigrants in the U.S. reported the lowest rates of health care services including preventive services that could decrease costs in emergency or follow-up care. When compared to U.S.-born Latinos,

undocumented immigrants reported much lower rates of insurance coverage (37 percent vs. 77 percent) and a usual source of care (58 percent vs. 79 percent). In addition, 40 percent of undocumented Latinos compared to 20 percent of U.S.-born Latinos did not receive any information from their health care provider in the previous year (Rodríguez, Vargas Bustamante, & Ang, 2009). As mentioned earlier, provisions of the 1996 Personal Responsibility Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act led to a significant drop in health coverage for recent immigrants (Pitkin Derosé et al., 2009) and dramatically increased the inequality between U.S.-born and foreign-born individuals when accessing health and other social services (Wallace et al., 2007). Our own analysis of Oregon's uncompensated care expenditures showed that although undocumented immigrants accounted for about 4 percent of the state's population in 2010, emergency care reimbursements for this population represented only 0.11 percent of all uncompensated care expenditures and 0.01 percent of total hospital expenditures in Oregon between 2006 and 2011 (López-Cevallos, 2014).

Children of immigrants experience particular barriers in obtaining health care services and are at higher risk for several serious health conditions (Weathers et al., 2008). One in four uninsured children in the U.S. is the child of Mexican immigrants. Nationwide, over 1.5 million children of Mexican immigrants have no health insurance, and an estimated six million children face significant challenges in accessing health insurance and health care. Children of Mexican immigrants are three times more likely to depend on public clinics and health centers than other children. Children of Mexican immigrants ages three or younger have higher rates of obesity and are more likely to have anemia than white children born in the U.S. (Wallace, Leite, Castañeda, & Schenker, 2009).

The US health care system faces many challenges when trying to provide services to low-income families (AHRQ, 1996; Cunningham, Banker, Artiga, & Tolbert, 2006). In some areas, health care providers face additional challenges serving linguistically and culturally diverse communities (Staiti, Hurley, & Katz, 2006), including navigating health and social service applications and



Photo: Joseph Prezioso/AFP via Getty Images



Photo: Julie Titus

procedures. Immigrants experience additional barriers to accessing health services such as stigma & discrimination, financial resources, insurance coverage, transportation, low health literacy, and language and cultural differences (Cunningham et al., 2006; López-Cevallos, Dierwechter, Volkmann, & Patton-Lopez, 2013). The working poor generally seek care from safety net providers, such as community health centers, which offer a sliding scale and serve all clients regardless of insurance status. To reduce language and cultural barriers, health care facilities may provide multilingual signage, interpreters, and even hire bilingual providers (Staiti et al., 2006). Although these actions represent positive steps towards improving access and providing more culturally responsive services, additional interventions are necessary to help bridge the gap between quality health care and low-income, immigrant clients.

It is crucial to reduce barriers that discourage immigrant families from accessing health and other social services in Oregon. Over the past decade, a number of efforts across the state are increasingly focused on active community outreach and family-centered care such as La Clínica del Cariño Community Health Center² in Hood River (Oregon Primary Care Association, 2009). Broadly, outreach can be defined as community-based activities with individuals and their families that aim to increase utilization and effectiveness (accessibility, acceptability, appropriateness) of health services.

Community health workers (CHWs), also known as “lay health advisors” or “health navigators,” can be uniquely positioned to bridge immigrant communities with health systems. Due to their deep understanding of the communities they serve and their experience with health systems, they can assist patients to overcome obstacles such

as fear or medical mistrust, lack of understanding about available services or how health systems in their local area operate, lack of health insurance, lack of transportation, and cultural and linguistic differences with health care providers (Perez-Escamilla, 2010; Rhodes, Foley, Zometa, & Bloom, 2007).

Community health workers may facilitate the acquisition of health care and other social services through cultural brokering (Jezewski, 1990). The “cultural broker” can intervene in situations where immigrants are unable to navigate the system and obtain needed health care and other social services. In a community health center, this helper is a staff member who would ultimately reduce stress and facilitate follow-up visits and acquisition of other health and social services. In other words, the broker can assist Latino families to piece together a wide range of resources to minimize the effects of a fragmented supply of health care and social services (Mines, Mullenax, & Saca, 2001). Hence, socio-cultural barriers at the organizational, structural and clinical levels may be reduced by a more culturally competent approach in which community outreach workers play an integral role (Betancourt, Green, Carrillo, & Ananeh-Firempong, 2003).

Over a decade ago, a national report (Farmworker Health Services, 2007) highlighted innovative practices in outreach to migrant and seasonal farmworkers, including coordinated efforts to bring together advocates, public health agencies, education, legal rights, and regulatory agencies, reaching clients at home and/or their workplaces, and coordinating outreach activities in order to connect patients to clinics and other resources in the community. Innovative practices highlighted in this publication included conducting outreach in the fields with a lunchtime celebration (Bakersfield, CA), reaching out to farmworker men via a soccer tournament (Corvallis, OR), or picking blueberries to raise money for farmworkers (Hammonton, NJ). Since that time, several organizations across the state have embraced this approach to serve immigrant and other marginalized communities, bringing lay health care advisors (Promotores) closer to the center of community health practice. Certification of training for Community Health Workers could serve such a purpose. A recent study in Texas points out that by establishing a standardized curriculum for Promotores, almost 700 certified CHWs reported that gaining certification improved self-development, recognition by others of their position

and worth, professional enhancement, new incentives to work, and the possibility for career development (Nichols, Berrios, & Samar, 2005).

In 2011, the Oregon Legislature passed HB 3650, establishing a public process to inform the development of Oregon’s Coordinated Care Organizations. As part of this effort, the legislation mandated the establishment and implementation of a plan to integrate community health workers, personal health navigators, peer support and peer wellness specialists, and birth doulas (referred to collectively as Traditional Health Workers) into Oregon’s Health System Transformation process. At about the same time after observing limited participation in policy-setting processes, the Oregon Latino Health Coalition and the Multnomah County Health Department’s Community Capacitation Center facilitated the creation of the Oregon Community Health Worker Association (ORCHWA, <https://www.orchwa.org/>), so that community health workers across the state could come together and advocate for their profession. Today, there are a number of programs that provide the necessary training for community/traditional health workers to qualify for state certification [<https://www.oregon.gov/oha/OEI/Pages/THW-OHA-Approved-Training-CEU.aspx>].

For primary care services to mitigate the effects of income inequality, they should be “regular and usual, user-friendly, and engender the trust of its patients” (Politzer et al., 2001). Similarly, providing interpretation services is an important step forward in improving the patient(client)-provider relationship (Flores, 2005). Moreover, the language skills and cultural understanding of a health care provider can affect their ability to reach a shared understanding of a patient’s health needs (Leigh, Lillie-Blanton, Martinez, & Collins, 1999; Morales, Cunningham, Brown, Liu, & Hays, 1999). Consequently, immigrant patients may be less satisfied, feel treated unfairly, and attribute their treatment to their own ethnicity and limited English language proficiency. Similar to community health workers, health care interpreters have created an organization to advance their priorities and professionalization (Oregon Health Care Interpreter Association, <http://ohcia.org/>), which includes supporting their members with navigating the training and requirements to become a qualified/certified health care interpreter by the Oregon Health Authority [<https://www.oregon.gov/oha/oei/Pages/hci-training.aspx>].

While “mainstream” U.S. culture tends to promote self-reliance, individualism, and direct, assertive forms of communication, many immigrant patients are more familiar with a collectivist cultural style characterized by indirect communication, accommodation, and deference to authority (Ashton et al., 2003). In other words, immigrants may be more likely to hold a family-centered model of medical decision-making rather than a patient autonomy model (Braddock, Edwards, Hasenberg, Laidley, & Levinson, 1999). Acculturation into the “mainstream” US culture may influence the communication style of an immigrant patient and determine health care satisfaction and outcomes as well. Researchers find a significant relationship between acculturation, adherence to medical therapy (Pachter & Weller, 1993), and utilization of preventive measures (e.g. breast self-exam, Pap smear, mammography) (Peragallo, Fox, & Alba, 2000).

However, other researchers have challenged over-reliance on “cultural” explanations of health inequities. The persistent, almost obsessive, use of individual or culture-centered models ignores the noxious effects of living in low-resourced communities, exposure to environmental hazards, and institutional patterns of unequal treatment (e.g., systemic racism), all of which contribute to health disparities (Zambrana & Carter-Pokras, 2010).

In my community-engaged work with Latinx immigrants in the mid-Willamette Valley in partnership with Latinx-serving organizations, schools and local government representatives, I have heard these groups highlight the need to develop trust and mutual respect in the provider-patient relationship:

“What must come first is respect given to the patient and the person that is providing the service.”

Additionally, immigrants cite the need for services to accommodate their work responsibilities:

“Even when one wants to come and ask for a service, it is not possible. The schedules don’t match. Sometimes it’s very difficult to ask for permission or arrange our work schedules to be able to come to the clinic.”

We shared this feedback with our local migrant health clinic which prompted them to extend their work hours until 7:00 pm one day a week, and open their doors one Saturday a month.

Researchers have found that trust is associated with active listening, providing adequate information, making sufficient time, and allowing patients to participate in the decision-making process (Keating, Gandhi, Orav, Bates, & Ayanian, 2004). Trust is also linked to physicians showing comforting and caring behavior, which in turn may encourage more participatory medical appointments (Thom, 2001). Such behavior is also recommended for other health care personnel, such as frontline office employees. If bias and insensitivity are felt as soon as immigrant and/or low-income patients access health and social services, they may not return. Personnel who are perceived as unfriendly, rude, or harsh may affect patients’ perceptions of a service and thus the quality of care received. In a study conducted with Latino mothers, many reported experiences in which office staff did not appear to understand their needs. They indicated that the insensitive treatment received from office staff influenced their deci-



Photo: Bob Nichols, USDA

Exhibit 1. The ¡Salud! Services Program

¡Salud! Services is a program of Tuality Healthcare Foundation & OHSU which provides access to healthcare services for Oregon's seasonal vineyard workers and their families.

¡Salud! is a unique collaboration between industry and health care providers, operating since 1993.

The mission of ¡Salud! is to bridge the gap between the workers (and their families) and the complex and confusing resources available (or not) to them in the medical system.

¡Salud! Services include:

- A mobile clinic providing basic screenings, clinical and educational services by bilingual/bicultural healthcare professionals and community health workers.
- Dental services in partnership with Medical Teams International.
- Vision services in partnership with OHSU Casey Eye Institute & Pacific University School of Optometry
- Occupational health
- Referrals to a primary care provider or community health center.
- Assistance with billing paperwork and financial assistance.

¡Salud! Services cover more than 20 percent of northern Willamette Valley vineyards and their workers. In 2019, 2,454 people across 238 businesses were registered in the program. Grants for care totaled \$131,289. Mobile dental clinics provided \$42,169 worth of services at no cost to clients.

Source: ¡Salud! 2019 Annual Report, available at:

<https://saludaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/%C2%A1Salud-Services-2019-Report.pdf>

sion whether to return for future appointments (Tandon, Parillo, & Keefer, 2005). Similarly, in our research with young-adult Latinos, we find that experiences of discrimination and medical mistrust led to less satisfaction with health care services (López Cevallos, Harvey, & Warren, 2014), and that foreign-born Latinos were more likely to experience health care discrimination in spite of their English-language proficiency (López-Cevallos & Harvey, 2016). Ultimately, family centered health services means that health care personnel must recognize and involve the patient's family. It also includes continuity of care (i.e. having a usual source of care) in order to build trust and assure that interactions are linguistically and culturally appropriate (Mainous, Diaz, Koopman, & Everett, 2007; Weech-Maldonado et al., 2003).

More providers across Oregon are increasingly offering culturally competent care with systematic outreach to immigrant families. Salud Medical Center in Woodburn, La Clínica del Cariño Family Health Care Center in Hood

River, La Clínica del Valle in Medford, the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization in Portland, the Virginia García Memorial Health Center in Washington and Yamhill Counties, and Tuality Health Care Foundation's ¡Salud! Program, to name a few, are good examples. Furthermore, organizations such as Virginia Garcia and ¡Salud! Services (Exhibit 1) include a mobile clinic as part of their outreach efforts, particularly towards farmworkers and their families. They send a team of providers, nurses, and health educators to the fields and camps to provide on-site screenings, health education, and schedule follow-up services.

Three specific Oregon policy successes deserve particular attention, as they are uniquely positioned to advance the principle of community well-being, regardless of documentation status: Cover All Kids; Prenatal Care for All Women; and Drivers' Licenses for All.

Following the passage of Senate Bill (SB) 558, since January 1, 2018, Cover All Kids enabled 18,000 children and teens (19 and younger) who previously were solely eligible for emergency Medicaid/CHIP benefits (e.g., CAWEM or CAWEM Plus) to qualify for full coverage (e.g., OHP/OHP Plus), (Oregon Health Authority, 2019). Specifically, Cover All Kids provided health insurance coverage to all children and teens younger than 19, regardless of immigration status, including those who are undocumented or recognized as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients, or who live in families that earn up to 305 percent of the federal poverty level (i.e., in 2019, a family of four that earns up to \$6,545 a month qualifies for Cover All Kids).

Expanding prenatal care for undocumented women was first advanced by the Oregon Latino Health Coalition and other allies coalescing around the Oregon Health Equity Alliance on a county-by-county basis. However, many counties for political more than economic reasons would not sign on to the effort in spite of the net benefit for their budgets because it would bring federal funding to cover most of the services. Hence, a different route made it possible for a statewide expansion of prenatal care for undocumented patients starting in October 2013. An administrative decision by the Office of the Governor allowed for prenatal care costs to be included in the Oregon Health Authority's budget, and consequently prenatal care coverage was made available across the state for all women,

regardless of documentation status (McDonald, 2013). In 2008, Oregon implemented SB 1080, requiring that all applicants for an Oregon Driver License or ID card provide proof of legal presence in the United States. At that time, almost two-thirds of the undocumented immigrants living in Oregon were thought to be potentially impacted by this measure (King, Corbett, Chiappetta, & López Salinas, 2011). Five years later, a broad coalition of grassroots organizations, public safety, business interests, and legislative partners lobbied for passage of Senate Bill 833, directing the Oregon Department of Transportation to issue driver cards to applicants who couldn't provide proof of legal presence in United States, "but [who] otherwise have complied with all requirements for type of driving privileges and have resided in Oregon for more than one year" (Oregon State Legislature, 2013). Although the measure was supposed to go into effect on January 1, 2014, it was overturned following a campaign that gathered enough signatures to be referred to Oregon voters (Measure 88) in November 2014, when it was defeated by a nearly two-thirds margin. It would take another five years (2019) for House Bill 2015 to eliminate the requirement that applicants for drivers' licenses must provide proof of legal presence (Oregon Driver & Motor Vehicle Services, 2020). The law went into effect on January 1, 2021.

3. Pending issues

As outlined in this chapter, immigrant communities in Oregon continue to struggle for better access to health services and improved health outcomes compared to their US-born counterparts. However, over the last decade, an increasing number of community-based organizations has taken the lead in promoting an immigrant rights agenda that led to the successful implementation of administrative mandates (prenatal care for all women) and legislative victories (health insurance for all children; drivers' licenses for all, regardless of documentation status) for immigrant communities across Oregon. Increasingly, these organizations have become savvier in navigating the local and statewide political landscape and positioned themselves to partner with state agencies (e.g., Oregon Health Authority, the Governor's Office), legislators, and other public advocacy groups (e.g., Oregon Advocacy Commissions; Racial Justice Council) to move their health equity agenda forward.

It is indeed gratifying to see such efforts aimed at improv-

ing access to health care for immigrants and the quality of the services being provided at both the state and local levels. Policy changes that promote immigrant integration can facilitate access to better jobs and health benefits that would likely increase access to preventive services, thereby reducing emergency room visits (Perez-Escamilla, 2010). As mentioned earlier, while a majority of children of immigrants are U.S. citizens, many have at least one non-citizen parent (Capps et al., 2005). The mixed legal status of many immigrant families has profound implications for our discussion of who gets to benefit from health care and welfare policy. Such "mixed" reality makes it more complicated to draw a line of who can obtain benefits. For instance, the 2020 Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) provided direct payments of up to \$1,200 per adult and \$500 per qualifying child under age 17 for eligible individuals. While many undocumented immigrants would have paid taxes using an ITIN (Individual Taxpayer Identification Number), they were excluded from this benefit if they did not have a valid Social Security Number (SSN). Moreover, other eligible adults or children in the household who did have SSN's were excluded from receiving these payments. Many stakeholders questioned this provision, and consequently, the most recent round of COVID-19 relief (The American Rescue Plan of 2021 – H.R. 1319) allowed eligible adults and children in the household who did have SSN's to receive direct payments even though the ITIN-holding adult remained ineligible (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2021).

Given the complex and challenging political and socioeconomic environment immigrant families face, policymaking efforts should consider more comprehensive measures that explicitly seek to protect the health and well-being of immigrant families. The current pandemic has further eroded the already precarious health and well-being of marginalized populations. We have now seen evidence of the disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths among communities of color (Fortuna, Tolou-Shams, Robles-Ramamurthy, & Porche, 2020) stemming from the long-standing root causes of health inequities. The regional COVID-19 Farmworker Study (Washington, Oregon and California) has documented the disproportionate burden and the limited supports farmworkers and their families have received to weather the effects of the pandemic (California Institute for Rural Studies, 2020)

While the Centers for Disease Control and other entities have been tracking COVID-19 impacts by race/ethnicity, no such information exists at the national or state levels specifically focusing on immigrant communities. Researchers have pointed out the likelihood of immigrants being disproportionately impacted by the pandemic (Clark, Fredricks, Woc-Colburn, Bottazzi, & Weatherhead, 2020; Page, Venkataramani, Beyrer, & Polk, 2020), and yet, no data exists to confirm such arguments. Moving forward, it will be necessary to provide such data to better monitor and address the needs of immigrant communities. In Oregon, it will entail strengthening public health capacity at the state and local levels and establishing a more robust network of governmental and non-governmental partnerships that can swiftly reach immigrants where they are through trusted mechanisms. Non-governmental organizations such as the ones mentioned above and many others are more likely to be trusted by immigrant and other marginalized communities. Hence, future governmental efforts must incorporate partnerships with these organizations in their *modus operandi*.

Such an approach will be more likely to reach these communities and sustain these organizations in the long term. Examples of best practices have grown, in part nurtured

by the community health assessment and improvement mandates of the Coordinated Care Organizations model and the community-based partnership approach of the Regional Health Equity Coalitions (RHECs) and Cover All Kids (both with the Oregon Health Authority). As collaborative community-led cross-sector groups organized regionally to identify and address health equity issues, RHECs build on the strengths of local communities to identify sustainable, long-term, policy, systemic and environmental solutions. There are currently only four RHECs covering nine Oregon counties (Office of Equity and Inclusion, 2021). More needs to be done to extend these efforts, communicating best practices and expanding these community-engaged models across the state. At a time of deep, intertwining crises (health, economic, social), it is vitally important to remind decision-makers and all Oregonians of the crucial role that health and other social support systems play, ensuring that immigrants and other marginalized populations have an opportunity to live longer, healthier lives. This is a matter of equity just as much as it is of sound social and economic policy. Ultimately, public investments in the health and well-being of immigrant families will benefit all of us, our local communities, and our state as a whole.



When wildfires began to spread across Oregon, tens of thousands of people were evacuated from their homes. Air quality in parts of the state became so bad that it maxed out the scale used to measure air quality. Meanwhile, the pandemic still gripped the state. AP Photo/Paula Bronstein

Endnotes

1. Here, “foreign-born” refers to people living in the United States who are not U.S. citizens at birth and includes naturalized U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents (e.g., green-card holders), refugees and asylees, other nonimmigrants (e.g., student, work, or other temporary visas), and those residing in the country without authorization (e.g., undocumented). In contrast, “US-born” refers to people living in the United States who are U.S. citizens by 1) being born in one of the 50 states or the District of Columbia; 2) people born in U.S. territories such as Puerto Rico or Guam; or 3) people who were born overseas to a U.S. citizen parent (Migration Policy Institute, 2019).
2. There are 32 federally qualified community health centers (FQHCs) in Oregon, operating in almost 270 sites across the state [<https://www.oregon.gov/oha/HPA/HP-PCO/Documents/FQHCs.pdf>]. Migrant health centers receive additional federal funding to provide services to migrant and seasonal farmworkers (MSFWs). There are currently 11 health centers in Oregon that receive federal funding to serve MSFWs. According to the Oregon Primary Care Association, over 460,000 Oregonians receive care at a community health center, including one in four people on the Oregon Health Plan (Medicaid). Of these, almost three out of four (73 percent) live below poverty, and most (94 percent) live at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level [<https://www.orpca.org/about-us>].

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José W. Meléndez, Calvin G. Hoff,
Leah Rausch, Melissa K. Graciosa,
and Alex Renirie
School of Planning, Public Policy, and
Management, University of Oregon



Chapter Three

The Landscape of Civic Participation Among Immigrants: Documenting Service on Decision-Making Bodies as a Third Type of Civic Engagement Activities

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Correspondence regarding this chapter should be addressed to José W. Meléndez, Assistant Professor, School of Planning, Public Policy, and Management, University of Oregon. E-mail: jmelende@uoregon.edu

The Landscape of Civic Participation Among Immigrants: Documenting Service on Decision-Making Bodies as a Third Type of Civic Activities

Immigrants' Engagement in Decision-Making Bodies

The use of public decision-making bodies to inform policymakers is common practice, especially considering that the public's involvement in decision-making processes is often required under national, state, county, and municipal statutes (Bryson et al., 2013; Fung, 2015; Quick & Feldman, 2011). However, inviting members of the public into such processes is more commonly used as a strategy for securing public buy-in around decisions that impact communities directly (Bryson et al., 2013; Fung, 2015; Quick & Feldman, 2011), even when public involvement is not required by law.

Focusing on immigrants and their communities across the state of Oregon, this chapter reports on a multi-phased, cross-sectional study (Singleton & Straits, 2010) titled, "Oregon's Decision-Making Bodies: Diverse and Equitable Representation" from September 2019 to April 2020. Specifically, we highlight findings related to boards and commissions involving members of the public at the city, county, and state levels. We document the role and function of the decision-making bodies inventoried in this study and the degree to which, during the time of the study, they were demographically representative of the various communities they impact. We posit that public participation in these bodies represents a third and under-researched type of civic engagement that bridges the two other, more well-known types: (1) community service and civic acts (e.g., volunteering for community-based organizations, voting, etc.), including cultural forms of civic engagement common among immigrant communities (e.g., church activities) (Meléndez & Martinez-Cosio, 2021), and (2) formalized political civic acts, including running for public office, volunteering for campaigns and petition drives, and engaging in policy advocacy. Between these two forms of civic engagement lies voluntary public involvement in decision-making bodies that advise and/or govern at various levels of government. As our findings demonstrate, these groups offered members of the public opportunities to develop new skills, collaborate in ways

that expand their networks, acquire new knowledge on the intricacies of how government works, and expand members' concepts of the potential benefits and limitations of government work. Our initial findings show that, for immigrants sitting on these bodies, their participation helped connect local/cultural acts to more explicit political ones along the continuum of civic engagement. Sitting on decision-making bodies is in fact a prerequisite experience that many elected officials share. Yet, this third type of civic engagement has received little scholarly attention, particularly in the literature on immigrants. We seek to fill that gap by framing participation in decision-making bodies as a bridge that completes the civic engagement trajectory of immigrants locating a voice in and for their communities.

In this chapter, we first provide a brief overview of decision-making bodies, outline the methodology used in the original research informing this chapter, and present two types of findings. Results from the first phase of the research address the typography of representation by immigrant members serving on decision-making bodies across the state. Findings from the second phase of our research draw from interviews conducted with 46 immigrant participants about their service on decision-making bodies. Finally, we discuss the findings identified as the challenges and opportunities faced by immigrants serving on these boards and conclude the chapter by making policy recommendations and proposing next steps for future research.

Overview of Decision-Making Bodies: Why They Matter

There are numerous committees, boards, and commissions that involve members of the public in different levels of governance structures, which, in this chapter, we refer to collectively as decision-making bodies. Though the extent to which these bodies are granted true decision-making power varies, members who volunteer to serve on them are positioned in unique proximity to decision-makers. Therefore, they are granted greater voice and/or authority than other members of the public who are targeted with more common outreach and engagement efforts by jurisdictions. Yet, many factors related to these bodies are undisclosed publicly or, as we discovered, not tracked. These factors include informa-

tion about who sits on these bodies, their demographic make-up, and any past, current, and future efforts to diversify them to reflect the growing diversity of communities. Together, these factors create a “black box” of related variables that this research intends to illuminate. We were driven to identify and then reduce the number of unknowns associated with this common governmental practice that impacts communities across Oregon, especially those comprising underrepresented groups such as immigrants. Since underserved communities usually lack meaningful representation at all levels of government bureaucracy (Bradbury and Kellough, 2011; Riccucci and Van Ryzin, 2017), their involvement in decision-making bodies can be seen as an alternate, and important, way for them to influence policy outcomes (Hafer and Ran, 2016; Quick and Feldman, 2011).

For immigrant members of the public who sit on these bodies, their experience varied widely depending on multiple variables. For example, some immigrant members reported tokenizing experiences in which their roles and influence were limited to top-down educating/information sharing by jurisdictions on decisions already made, with no ability to influence or change outcomes. Others experienced spaces that were therapeutic—that is, spaces where the act of telling their stories was the purpose of their service. Although impactful for members, this type of board experience limited their influence over decisions and/or policies.

Meanwhile, others reported transformative experiences wherein roles and responsibilities were clearly delineated, while also remaining flexible based on the agency and needs of the participants. In these types of boards, participants experienced a sense of purpose and reported having a voice in creating and shaping decisions and policies. The incorporation of immigrants into society depends in part on when and how immigrants engage in claims-making actions (Meléndez, 2020). Claims-making actions relate to whether groups feel a sense of belonging, what kinds of spaces and information are available for them to engage with, and “their ability or inability to voice their concerns and demand rights” (Abrego, 2011).

For immigrants, the experiences gained from serving on decision-making bodies may have implications not only for the work of the board itself, but also for the larger

community if participants develop a sense that civic engagement in their respective boards can also be applied to other venues in the community. In addition, for some participants, this kind of purposeful service may be a steppingstone for their ambitions, as they prepare to run for public office or seek more coveted volunteer positions (e.g., on boards of education). We note that a common element among those elected to public positions is their experience serving on some form of decision-making body. Although we have not measured the degree to which this observation holds true across all elected officials, it is common enough for us to treat it as a potential variable among those who gain formal office. We reasoned that if there is a want or need to increase the number of immigrants elected to public positions, there should be a preceding increase in their representation on various decision-making bodies. Thus, the central question was, to what extent are immigrants represented within these bodies?

Methodology

Research Design

This cross-sectional study integrates mixed methods (Creswell & Clark, 2017) of data collection including online research, inventories of boards and individuals, semi-structured interviews, and quantitative and qualitative analytical approaches (see Table 1).

Table 1
Summary of Research Questions and Research Design Methods

| Phase | Research Question | Research Design |
|---------|--|---------------------------------|
| Phase 1 | What are the different levels of board decision making available across the state? | Online Research & Inventory |
| | To what extent are immigrants represented within decision-making bodies? | Online Research & Questionnaire |
| Phase 2 | What challenges prevent or discourage immigrants from engaging in decision-making bodies? | Interviews |
| | What features do immigrants report as supporting their meaningful participation on decision-making bodies? | Interviews |

In the first phase of the study, we wanted to know the extent to which a phenomenon existed as suggested by our two initial research questions: What were the different levels of decision-making available across the state (e.g., from appointed and elected boards to other spaces); and to what extent were immigrants represented at these different levels?

Phase 1: Building the Inventories

We set out to investigate the degree to which immigrant communities play a role in decision-making that impacts their livelihoods. Research in the first phase began in the fall of 2019 with an assessment of the landscape of immigrant engagement in government decision-making through two distinct inventories. Initially, we conducted online research of jurisdictions across Oregon to identify the different decision-making bodies. We created a state-wide inventory of relevant commissions, committees, and boards—referred to as the “board inventory”—which captured information related to geography, type of jurisdiction, topical focus, availability of board roster information, and, importantly, decision-making authority. Similar methods were used to determine the diversity of these bodies. When the demographics of board members were not readily available through public websites, we sent a short survey to the person(s) identified as the staff contact for the body, requesting that they provide basic demographic information of board members. The demographic data we gathered populated our second inventory of individuals who identify as foreign-born or second-generation immigrants currently serving on an inventoried board—referred to as the “member inventory.”

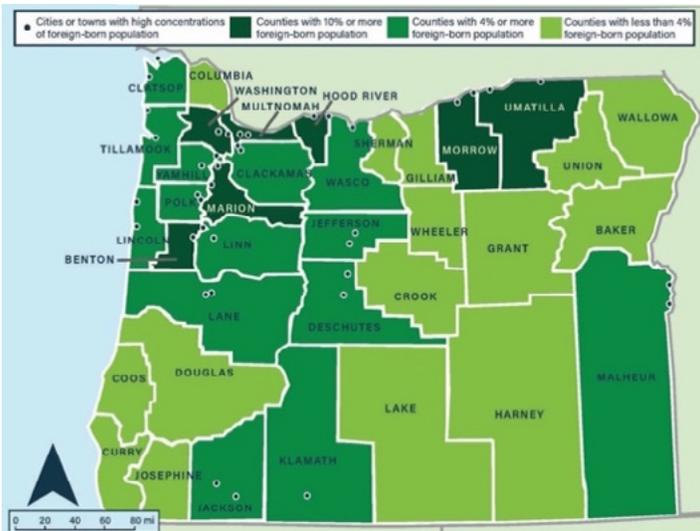
Building these two initial datasets allowed us to gain a clearer sense of the scope and depth of the phenomena of interest. When we contacted jurisdictions asking for information to help populate our member inventory, their levels of cooperation ranged from completely or actively cooperative, passively cooperative, actively resistant, or completely non-cooperative.

When the requested data were not shared and all other means of accessing the data were exhausted, we submitted a FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) request to obtain the information.¹

Board Inventory

The board inventory focused on 21 Oregon counties where foreign-born individuals represent at least 4 percent of the total population according to 2013-2017 American Community Survey five-year estimates (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). As Figure 1 illustrates, within each county, researchers identified up to two incorporated cities or towns where the foreign-born population was most highly concentrated based on census demographic mapping data available on the website Social Explorer (<https://www.socialexplorer.com>). This expanded the inventory to a total of 54 geographies, including all major cities and regions of the state, representing the diversity of Oregon communities from urban Portland to rural Irrigon. In addition to city and county jurisdictions, we considered statewide boards and committees, as well as special district governing bodies.

Figure 1
Percent of Foreign-Born Individuals Across Oregon by County.



The research team sought to create a comprehensive inventory representing many types of boards while limiting the scope to make data collection feasible. In operationalizing the types of board categories included, we consid-

¹ In March 2020, COVID-19 hit as we were finishing up our inventory of counties and special districts. Once a statewide shutdown was ordered, we were not surprised that our follow-up with staff went unanswered. Additionally, we stopped this phase of the research out of consideration for the new reality the public was dealing with at the time.

ered which would be more important to immigrants and other marginalized groups. We focused on basic needs as opposed to infrastructure by including, for example, public health and service coordination but not hospital facilities boards. Given our finding that decision-making authority varied by community and topic, we developed six categories to describe the authority and purpose of each body: advocacy; agency advisory; council advisory; governing; statutory; and project-specific advisory.

The preceding comprehensive view of the phenomena laid the groundwork for Phase 2, during which we sought to analyze the data collected in Phase 1. Although no specific methods of analysis were used to create our inventory, once we organized and categorized the data, we ran statistical and other analytical queries to identify patterns and themes across a number of variables.

Member Inventory

Having completed the board inventory, we then identified the total number of members on each board and determined how many self-identified as first-generation or second-generation immigrants. For the purposes of our study, we relied on the follow definitions:

- **First-generation immigrant:** an individual who migrated from another country, including refugees and asylum seekers, regardless of age, status, or time in the country.
- **Second-generation immigrant:** an individual who is the child of one or more first-generation immigrants.

We chose to focus on both first- and second-generation immigrants since limiting ourselves to the former would have made our sample pool of participants quite small. At the same time, we reasoned that third-generation immigrants may be too removed from the immigrant experience to feel that their role in decision-making bodies is related in any way to representing immigrant communities (Duncan & Trejo, 2018).

Once an individual was verified as a first- or second-generation immigrant—either through self-identification or follow-up with the board key contact—we added them to the member inventory. Although we see our member inventory as the most comprehensive of its kind for the state of Oregon, we make no claim that it is complete. It is incomplete for a variety of reasons, including but not

limited to a lack of publicly available data and variable cooperation from staff in different jurisdictions.

Phase 2: Immigrant Interviews

Participants

Having collected the baseline data for the first phase of the study, we turned to Phase 2: investigating the quality of engagement by immigrants on the boards. To do this, from November 2019 – March 2020, the research team conducted 46 short, semi-structured interviews (Weiss, 1995) with immigrant members in our inventory to answer the second set of research questions: what challenges prevented or discouraged immigrants from engaging in the different levels of decision making; and what features supported the incorporation of immigrants in more successful instances?

We contacted potential immigrant participants directly when possible, or through the staff point of contact identified during the inventory process. Each interview, which lasted between 30 and 75 minutes, was divided into three sections: personal and professional experience; joining the board; and serving on the board. The interviews illuminated opportunities and barriers immigrants face in accessing and maintaining these roles, and how government institutions could better facilitate access and influence of immigrants and their respective communities. With the exception of two interviews that occurred in person and one via video call, all of the interviews were conducted over the phone by a research team member, recorded, and later transcribed.²

Of the 46 interviews, 34 identified as first-generation immigrants, and 12 identified as second-generation. The participants represented diverse countries of origin, race/ethnicity, and gender. They also came from a variety of geographies, including rural and urban areas, and some sat on statewide boards and committees. Importantly, in addition to demographic and geographic diversity, the interview participants represented a diversity of board types with different decision-making authority and jurisdiction. This diversity of topical focus and decision-making authority in particular provides contrast amongst

² One of the interviews was conducted and analyzed in Spanish. Names of individuals and places have been given pseudonyms when necessary.

the boards to understand how participants' influence might relate to their board authority. Once the interviews were conducted, they were analyzed by two independent researchers using discourse and content analysis methods in NVivo (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Saldaña, 2011).

Findings

Findings from Phase 1

We found that county bodies tracked the demographics of members of bodies at a significantly lower rate than city, statewide, or special district bodies. This may be due to the generally under-resourced capacity of most counties, where there were far fewer staff responsible for supporting decision-making bodies. The number of staff directly assigned to support decision-making bodies in a jurisdiction appeared to be related to lack of funding, capacity, and recognition of the importance of public engagement practices. Nevertheless, our interviews indicated that these staff members can play vital support roles for others.

We zeroed in on how publicly available the information about decision-making bodies is to the general public and how transparent jurisdictions were about this practice. This practice varied significantly. Some jurisdictions such as Eugene and Hillsboro were completely cooperative, tracking key information and freely sharing their data with the research team. Others cooperated actively with our inquiries, even if they were not tracking the data when initially contacted (e.g., Dallas, Bend, Hood River, Irrigon). Finally, some were actively resistant, refusing to forward our inquiries to members serving on their boards (e.g., Corvallis, Springfield) when we could not find membership data online, or non-cooperative, quickly going silent or diminishing the value of our inquiries (e.g., Klamath Falls, Madras, Milton, Freewater, Polk County). Across city and county levels, responses varied based on the specific staff assigned to support specific bodies.

Beyond the challenges described above, the life-altering onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the middle of our research left our inventory with some gaps where information simply could not be collected. This incompleteness notwithstanding, we maintain that our member inventory is the most comprehensive of its kind for the state of Oregon. The findings in Table 2 indicate that the majority of bodies we inventoried do not have immigrant

representation, nor do they track demographic information. While only making up 4.16 percent of all bodies inventoried, statewide bodies were the most likely to record demographic information and to have immigrant representation. 100 percent of statewide bodies had publicly accessible rosters, indicating that, compared to other jurisdictions, statewide bodies maintained transparency best practices at a higher rate. Although the interview data provided insights into how transparency best practices impacted rates of representation for currently underrepresented groups, further research is necessary to tease out this impact.

Given that our research looked at immigrants regardless of what country of origin they or their parents immigrated from, our data varied across racial/ethnic demographics of the interviewed participants. The categories in the table do not align with the racial categories reported by the U.S. Census. We grouped individuals by the category with which they identified, preferring to add layers of complexity to our reporting rather than simply meeting problematic census standards (Kertzer & Arell, 2002). Among the participants, the most common racial group represented was Asian, making up 38.18 percent of all respondents. White was the second most common racial group, making up 34.55 percent of respondents. No gender was disproportionately overrepresented, with 51.06 percent of respondents being female and 48.94% being male (although no participants identified as gender non-binary). 72.3 percent of the participants were first-generation immigrants, and 27.75 percent were second-generation immigrants.

Table 3 shows that, out of all the decision-making bodies with one or more immigrant members, the most common topical focus is Budget. However, the foci with the highest rates of immigrant representation are Education and Race, Equity, and Human Rights. The above three foci fall under our study’s decision-making authority categorization as governing, council advisory at the local level, and advocacy at the state level respectively. Yet, immigrants tended to be underrepresented on school boards in both the most populous and most diverse districts in Oregon. In this category diverse rural districts have a higher proportion of representation than their urban counterparts. Several variables may play a role here, including the different costs of running for school board positions across jurisdictions, as well as the age gap between immigrants and non-immigrants, with immigrants in rural counties more likely to be parents of young children compared to their non-immigrant counterparts.

Initial Insights from Phase 2

The discourse analysis of participants’ own words revealed a broad, diverse set of variables which illuminated themes across participants; it also highlighted contradictions between the goal of including members of the public in decision-making and how that inclusion is actually practiced by jurisdictions. Our findings represent a step toward clarifying how this common democratic practice is experienced by immigrants. They name and describe particular unknowns that impact the utility of immigrants’ service time on these boards and offer insights into the black box of participation.

Table 2
Representation and Demographics Findings

| Jurisdiction | # of Bodies with 1+ Immigrant Members | % of Bodies with 1+ Immigrant Members | # of Immigrant Members Identified | % of Immigrants Within all Jurisdiction Members |
|------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| City | 25 out of 228 | 10.87% | 34 out of 1,795 | 1.89% |
| County | 21 out of 199 | 10.55% | 30 out of 1,136 | 2.64% |
| Statewide | 7 out of 22 | 31.82% | 27 out of 246 | 10.98% |
| Special District | 7 out of 55 | 12.73% | 9 out of 312 | 2.88% |
| Total | 60 out of 504 | 11.9% | 100 out of 3,489 | 2.87% |

Table 3*Category Data and Findings*

| Category | City | County | State-wide | Special District | Total | % of Total Bodies | # Bodies w/ 1+ Immigrant | % of Total Bodies w/ 1+ Immigrant | % of Category w/ 1+ Immigrant Member |
|--------------------------|------|--------|------------|------------------|-------|-------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Education | 0 | 8 | 3 | 23 | 34 | 6.75% | 7 | 11.67% | 20.59% |
| Transportation | 24 | 23 | 2 | 7 | 56 | 11.11% | 9 | 15% | 16.07% |
| Housing | 8 | 12 | 1 | 0 | 21 | 4.17% | 2 | 3.33% | 9.52% |
| Planning / Zoning | 80 | 38 | 2 | 0 | 120 | 23.81% | 5 | 8.33% | 4.17% |
| Parks and Recreation | 19 | 11 | 1 | 12 | 43 | 8.53% | 5 | 8.33% | 11.63% |
| Budget | 42 | 32 | 0 | 0 | 74 | 14.68% | 12 | 20% | 16.22% |
| Library | 19 | 4 | 0 | 11 | 34 | 6.75% | 2 | 3.33% | 5.88% |
| Health & Human Services | 11 | 52 | 6 | 0 | 69 | 13.69% | 9 | 15% | 13.04% |
| Safety & Policing | 11 | 15 | 1 | 2 | 29 | 5.75% | 3 | 5% | 10.34% |
| Race Equity Human Rights | 14 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 24 | 4.76% | 6 | 10% | 25% |

Recruitment

Intentional, targeted efforts to diversify board membership beyond existing networks were identified as challenging to conduct. This may be inversely related to the power of networks, in which individuals were more likely to be invited to join because of their existing status and connections. Nevertheless, across participants, regardless of their education level, generation, or even race/ethnicity, personal recruitment was the norm, both regarding how each individual learned about the opportunity to serve on the board and how the board currently recruits new board members. Although positions were still advertised when they became available, within our interview dataset only two participants (4 percent) reported having independently sought out the position, while four (9 percent) received a forwarded announcement, and 22 (48 percent) had an intentional conversation about the position and applying. These included people in their networks, currently serving on the body, or staff supporting the body.

“And then, when the time came, and our school district—that person [who] was there for a long time.... decided not to run. So, somebody came and asked me, “Would you like to consider?” I said yes.”

S. Chandragiri

The need for more personalized recruitment was highlighted in two ways. 11 of the 22 individuals (50 percent) who had had a strategic conversation about the position mentioned that recruitment included direct efforts to diversify the membership of the existing board. Eight of the 22 participants (36.4 percent) recalled that even when they were personally asked to apply, they had not been aware of the board’s existence or its purpose.

The lack of awareness of and knowledge about decision-making bodies spoke to the need for jurisdictions to do a better job communicating about what boards exist and, more critically, how they impact communities and whom the membership is supposed to represent. This

finding further revealed the need for boards themselves—and jurisdictions at large—to demystify and clarify the role of boards, and to educate the public by describing available board positions in order to increase the diversity of individuals applying. This demystifying process was connected to the need for greater transparency around the application process so that those considering applying or submitting applications know what to expect.

Networks

Participants spoke about knowing staff, elected officials, or others who had served or were connected to institutions related to the body’s mission who had reached out to them to ask if they would be interested in serving or who had forwarded recruitment materials. Undoubtedly, the role that networks played in opening up opportunities to serve on a decision-making body was a key variable across participants, given that, as mentioned earlier, only two (4.3 percent) individuals applied to be on a board without any other individuals connecting them to the opportunity.

What was clear across both generations was that gaining access to a new set of networks for immigrants held potential not only for individuals, but also for communities that may now have a new “insider” pulling others in, as they funnel information and opportunities to other immigrants.

In our data, Latino individuals in particular recognized the existential need for networking opportunities specific to their community. Interestingly, two of the six Latino participants with bachelor’s degrees (33.3 percent) or lower discussed creating space for culturally specific networks as a result of their own lack of connections. Meanwhile, we found that immigrants with master’s degrees or higher, regardless of their generation, often had networks directly connected with local politicians, commissioners, or other board members as compared to those with bachelor’s degrees or lower. Nine of the 20 participants (45 percent) with master’s degrees or higher reported having connections with commissioners or politicians, compared to three of the 12 (25 percent) with bachelor’s degrees or lower. Participants noted that these connections were instrumental to accessing board membership. Our findings suggest that boards should spend time thinking about the types of networks they foster or lack

“Si pues pienso que, que mucha gente no sabe acerca de eso [comité]. No sabe cómo se maneja el sistema, de qué sirve, he encontrado personas que me han dicho ‘¿cómo llegaste ahí?’ Pues, yo llegue, bueno referí referida por alguien que un miembro de la clínica donde yo soy paciente que me invitó. Pero mucha gente me ha dicho ‘¿bueno cómo llegastes ahí?’ Pues, o sea, que la gente que quiera participar, si no tienen como en la vida o el acceso, para eso no llegan ahí.”

S. Mendoza

“And so, you know, connections matter.... Be part of those groups and bring some of your friends to be part of those groups, too. Because ... I realized how important it is to know the right people. You have to know the right people, and I don’t think we.... once you get to a point where you know, some of these people that bring others along with you so they can get to know people, and then I think it’ll get to the point where one day we will be the people with the connections. And ... it’s a slow process, but I think it’s—you know, together, we need to be able to do that. But ... most important, we need to recognize that that’s the way that we have to do it.”

O. Campos

access to as they seek to diversify their membership. Nine of the 30 non-White participants (30 percent) indicated that networks were based on race or related training programs, while 23 of the 30 (76.6 percent) reported that their networks centered on professional or related training programs. Determining the networks that boards have access to reflected a step toward greater intentionality in recruitment. As one participant, R. Ross, highlighted:

“Well, you know, for these boards, you have to have intentionality to include other people. So, since I’ve joined, we’ve made a very intentional effort to reach out to.... And we’ve also tried to get a more diverse group of people involved. This is a pretty White area of Oregon.... So, we’ve tried to include people from other counties who are Latino; we’ve [also] tried to see if we can get some members from the Native American community. But it would have to be an intentional process. So, there’s intentionality with us and, you know, this could apply to all sorts of other groups—LGBTQ, other groups. So, it’s a bit organic, but we have tried...”

Thus, given that most participants became involved with their board because someone they knew had a personal conversation with them, our policy recommendations emphasize intentional recruitment.

Training

Not all participants received training related to civic engagement or leadership before joining a board. However, the 32 persons (69.5 percent) who did noted the impact of more substantial trainings (e.g., those lasting longer and involving a cohort of individuals) compared to one-off training experiences. These more substantial trainings fell into two categories: those that were identity-based and those for the general public. Identity-based trainings were targeted toward race/ethnicity, gender, or labor identity (e.g., union, farmworkers), and they created or expanded the individual’s network, impacting the previously described findings. Unanimously, those who had previously completed a substantial training opportunity spoke positively about the experience, the skills and knowledge

gained, and the connections and networking opportunities they received.

“I was involved starting with my own community, through the leadership program ... they did, as part of that 1-year program where they taught us skills and they did ... experiential-type learning opportunities. When we got to envision ourselves sitting in the mayor’s office, sitting in their seats, and saying, you can be this type of leader.”

And it really, I think, kind of created a sense of, ‘Oh, wow, I think this could be me some day, but this can also be many people who are like me.’ And so, through that they also connected up with organizations in the state that were already doing some things....”

T. Faisao

Those who had not received substantial training often expressed interest in accessing a more extensive orientation. Some shared that they had learned by just participating and jumping into board service, although they reported that a year elapsed before they gained greater confidence in fulfilling their roles. Additionally, eight individuals (17.3 percent) experienced substantial leadership development training geared toward the general public, but they still reported that these trainings had positive impact. Specifically, they discussed the trainings’ influence on their confidence and highlighted the benefit of having increased their networks.

“I had done the Eugene/Springfield leadership program. I did that. And that was, again, very, very useful because you get, you know, trotted around the community and, you know, you see how the city works and how this, how the county works and ... how the university works and how the hospital works, and you meet all the CEOs ... and that’s useful, the Mayors, all the ... you kind of get

the lay of the land a little bit and see a little bit who's who, and I would recommend that to anybody who really wants to ... get involved in the community."

J. Daniel

Also, eight individuals (17.3 percent) acknowledged the value of participating in equity-focused trainings before joining their respective boards. In particular, they found the frameworks useful for approaching their board service, considering diverse perspectives, and working across differences.

Having access to civic and leadership trainings prior to board service increased the interviewees' skills and knowledge while further developing their dispositions toward community and civic service. Their time on a board was also highly influential in furthering their learning across various domains, which we describe in the next section.

Learning

Considerable learning occurs while one serves on a board. We identified three distinct types of learning: dispositions; professional development; and government. Learning new dispositions involved developing new attitudes, ways of seeing the world, or of people as a result of board service. Professional development learning connected to a broad array of skills and knowledge acquired as a result of service on the board. Government learning related to the acquisition of new knowledge about the processes of government institutions as a result of one's service. Regardless of the combination of learning types that individuals spoke about in their interviews, it was clear that the experience of serving on a board was consequential on multiple levels.

It seems promising that we were hard pressed to find differences among the 25 participants who we identified as having engaged in learning dispositions. This suggests that, regardless of education level, generation, or race/ethnicity, the act of serving on a board represented a transformative experience. When analyzing how board service had changed participants' dispositions, three outcomes emerged: building self-esteem; increasing agency; and enhancing self-efficacy. Eighteen of the 25 individuals (72 percent) mentioned that, as a result of their board service,

they now felt better more prepared and capable. As R. Legras shared, "It's given me [a new level of] confidence and knowledge."

Additionally, 11 of the 25 participants (44 percent) who identified learning dispositions not only described the value of their service but also indicated that they were capable of taking on an active role on their respective boards and exerting influence as a result.

"As I mentioned in the beginning, you know, that we need to be in those spaces. We can't shy away from that—it's happened too many times before. At a minimum ... by doing that we enter the record. And we are stating the case. And I think, you know, in the times that I've been involved in policy advocacy in the state, I'm seen some wins, and I think that provides further motivation."

C. Alarcon

Gaining a sense that one's presence mattered was a significant step toward self-efficacy, with individuals taking on different or bolder actions than they would have previously. Such actions included looking beyond the intimidating factor of government and seeing the potential of one's influence and feeling motivated to run for public office.

"It's kind of a cool epiphany for folks to see because there's a lot of intimidation when it comes to being involved with government. But once you overcome a little intimidation, people are almost disappointed. Because I thought it would be something else. And in reality, it's not. But it's cool to see people have the epiphany, of what it is to be involved with government and more so how much people can influence what happens with government... Because they were able to get over that—that hump of intimidation and have their eyes open to the opportunities."

M. Gonzales

Regardless of the type of committee they served on, four of the 26 individuals (15.4 percent) who discussed learning about local government indicated they had learned specifically about how resources were distributed. Additionally, nine of the 26 individuals (34.6 percent) observed that learning the lifespan of policy development from conception to implementation was instrumental to enhancing understanding of their role on the boards.

Participants also reported a host of skills and knowledge they acquired during their board service. Although we categorize these acquisitions as professional development learning, we note that when individuals discussed these skills and knowledge, they were not always connected to their jobs or professions, thereby expanding what we captured under this category. This included learning how to collaborate, manage processes and differences, and “see the big picture.”

“Being able to really see the big picture and analyze budgets and ask questions and give direction, visionary direction for the organization. And this is a skill that’s phenomenal. I think it would serve me whether I’m on volunteering boards, governing board[s], or other[s]. I think the problem solving on a board ... is very, very challenging. It’s never the same situation or almost never the same situation. There is something new to learn and sometimes we’re making a decision that needs us to think critically about what ... our values or priorities [are]. So yeah ... I think one of the most important things I learned ... and gained is the ability to think critically about the system.”

S. Al-AbdRabbuh

Here, it is worth connecting back to the value that some participants placed on equity trainings prior to their service on the boards. This value was also shared by individuals who, through their board service, had learned a great deal, either through equity trainings or engaging in equity conversations during board work.

Finally, highlighting the intricate interrelation of our findings, all individuals reported learning how to gain access to connections/networks. Learning how not to reinvent the wheel or how to leverage others’ expertise for future potential were key skills acquired during board service. We think this is an important finding, considering that, as one participant observed, networking does not come naturally to most individuals.

Culture

Perception of board culture depended on existing or evolving group norms, values, and processes that shaped the board’s work and the interactions between members. In our study board culture was linked to the types of expertise that board members were expected to bring to their work, the relative formality or informality of meetings, and the types of relationships that could be cultivated during board service. Boards whose members relied heavily on technical and professional expertise and were more likely to be recruited from academic or professional networks typically differed culturally from those that invited board members to contribute based on their lived experiences.

Differences in board culture were manifested through whether participants, based on their racial/ethnic identity, felt welcome to participate and navigated the challenges they faced in doing so. Each of the two Black participants (100 percent) noted that they felt constrained and that their own priorities were not welcome in their formal board culture. Similarly, five of the eight Asian interviewees (62.5 percent) noted that they felt unwelcome or intimidated in speaking from their lived experience. Conversely, none of the 16 White participants noted feeling constrained to express themselves regardless of whether their board had a formal or informal culture.

“Sometimes I ... don’t feel very comfortable to talk in the room because most of the members are American. And here in Portland is, like, a very White city, so most of the people are White.... Not that my opinion doesn’t matter, but I sometimes I feel [it] will be a little out of the context. So, I think that’s my, my main challenge, but it’s still ... sometimes I feel like just being on the table and being, like, able to raise my voice, like, if I feel like, is a big accomplishment.”

L. Carvalho Nascimento

In addition to race/ethnicity, we found that individuals’ experiences with board culture correlated with their education levels. Four of the 19 people with bachelor’s degrees or lower (21.05 percent) reported feeling intimidated by their lack of knowledge and one (5.2 percent) discussed feeling intimidated as the racial minority on their board. Although one might surmise that board culture would feel less intimidating for an individual with more education, five of the 27 people with master’s degrees or higher (18.5 percent) reported feeling intimidated as the racial minority on their board, and two (7.4 percent) reported feeling intimidated by their lack of knowledge. For non-White immigrant members, the experience of what are commonly referred to as *micro-aggressions* was disheartening, requiring, as one participant described, extensive emotional labor. Often, this type of unsupportive culture posed a substantial barrier for individuals, resulting in less participation and/or more attention given to how they engaged so as to mitigate the perceived reception of their message.

These real challenges notwithstanding, 29 individuals (63 percent) reported experiencing a constructive board culture that, regardless of disagreement or difference, allowed them to engage fully in the substantive work of their respective bodies. As benefits of positive board culture, individuals reported useful discussions, the ability to build relationships, and a realization that bureaucrats and board members in general all care about and are working to help their communities.

“I think, overall, we have a really great relationship. I think, in general, there—everyone is open to have conversation and open to disagree with each other. But I think, in general, we are all able to find some agreement to understand each other. And that’s the goal at the end of the day, because we all come—all of us in that room individually have different political ideologies and lived experiences that are vastly different, but at the end of the day, we do value our community. And it may look different in different ways. But I think we all want Hillsboro to be successful.”

A. Diaz Rios

Many individuals attributed their positive feelings toward board cultures to the tone set by their respective chairs or to the helpfulness of staff assigned to work with boards. Participants who characterized their board culture as productive tended to highlight their board’s balance between formal and informal procedures, related primarily to how meetings were run (e.g., agenda setting, Robert’s Rules of Order [RRO]), the ability of members to engage in constructive conversations, and the positive interactions between members (e.g., supportive, caring, friendly, flexible). We noted that nine of the 44 individuals (20.4 percent) who discussed culture found RRO to be intimidating, with eight of these individuals being non-White immigrants. This factor plays a key role in defining the perceived culture of a board; without intentional and sustained efforts to mitigate the intimidating nature of RRO, the culture of the board would likely remain intimidating and unwelcoming. Meetings that encouraged more informal sharing were perceived as more inclusive than those adhering to formal procedural protocols.

“I do have sort of a concluding thought. Going back to the Robert’s Rules of Order. Yeah, it just seems like a very White set of rules. And I mean, for somebody who is not familiar with the way that it says parliamentary procedure, right, it just is culturally, like, that’s really hard to—I mean, you kind of just have to learn by observing and going through that, and so I just wonder if ... Robert’s Rules of Order is the best way to engage if you want a more culturally diverse board.”

Q. Ngo

The ability to find the formal–informal balance seemed to be aided by jurisdictions that organized trainings or retreats outside normal meeting times, since board members were more likely to discuss the relationships they had developed with fellow members.

Barriers

Participants described obstacles to sustained board service which either they had faced or they had perceived others face, actually or potentially. These barriers usually related to issues of accessibility, that is, resources that were provided or could have been provided to make board service easier for themselves or for others with particular needs. Of the 35 participants who identified personal barriers, 20 (57.1 percent) cited accessibility barriers such as limited engagement opportunities in conference call meetings, the technical language used in materials and during meetings, and lack of language translation provisions. Notably, of the 40 participants who identified barriers for others, 22 (55 percent) reported experiencing similar barriers themselves. We see this as promising since it suggests that individuals were aware of the limitations that their fellow or future board members might face. Being aware of challenges is typically a first step toward problem solving.

Participants often mentioned childcare as an accessibility concern, either personally (8.5 percent) or for others (20 percent). Having access to some kind of childcare was key for individuals in the middle stages of their lives, which may be another type of support needed to diversify board membership.

“Some of the feedback that I get from community members ... is that it’s tough. If you have children, it’s really tough to participate.... I think for me ... one of the challenges I think—or accommodations that might be nice is the opportunity to have childcare there onsite. You know, some partnership maybe with, you know, local daycare—you know, an in-home provider that we can partner with and provide that. You know, the other thing, too, is not that I can’t do it at home, right, but it is challenging, you know, the dinner portion of it, too. You know, providing maybe some sort of meal for, not necessarily adults, but maybe if you’re doing childcare for the kids, you don’t have to go home and worry about that, too.”

O. Campos

“The distance is one challenge that—the conference calls.... I’m so glad that Zoom and that kind of system not only the phone, like you—I am now with you because sometimes when you have a meeting by phone, I had that before, you lost some time because there—you are in your home and you’re around things and maybe you lose ... what they ... are talking about. [With] Zoom, you see the people and it’s more interactive. Yeah, that’s—driving from here to Portland in wintertime is sometimes ... difficult.”

R. Marine

We found that more people identified childcare as a barrier for others rather than themselves, which may speak to the challenge this presents for those with young children who wish to join boards and were not included in our data set.

Regarding statewide decision-making bodies, the location of meetings in the geographic centers of Portland or Salem was seen as an obstacle by five participants (35.7 percent of individuals on statewide bodies) who lived outside these areas. Those living east of the Cascades had to travel vast distances to attend meetings or choose to dial in by phone, a less personalized way to engage, reducing the relationship-building aspects of service that were mentioned as being so instrumental to positive board culture.

It is an open question whether the popularization of Zoom during the COVID-19 pandemic will mitigate these challenges once in-person meetings resume.

We also identified barriers that were not resource-related but had to do with personal and intersubjective limitations that participants indicated were formidable, jeopardizing sustained engagement on a board. Individuals across education levels and immigrant generations identified issues such as differences in communication styles and formats like RRO that pose challenges to establishing positive board culture. Fourteen of the 35 individuals (40 percent) cited personal and intersubjective limitations. Of the 40 individuals who identified barriers for others, 14 (35 percent) identified these types of limitations. When participants identified personal and intersubjective limitations for others, there was no difference in frequency

As one participant highlighted:

“Part of the problem is that—and it’s more of a problem for the City of Hillsboro city council positions—is that all these are unpaid positions. And so it eliminates a lot of people right off the bat.... But like the city council—it’s not possible for a lot of people to spend so much unpaid time working on this, and so that, to me, eliminates a lot of people because of that, because they’re not going to apply for it. And, and so, yeah, better—you know, you see a lot of, still, a lot of White male retired people, still, you know, more than their fair share in terms of citizens [in] Hillsboro. It’s because, you know, they are the ones that have the time and the money that they can afford to do that....It’s represented on the City of Hillsboro board. It’s represented on, you know, all the boards and the city council. So, the diversity is bubbling up. But one of the main preventative measures is or prevention is the lack of, you know, financial compensation that people can’t afford if it’s a large time commitment....I think also, historically, there is a perception of what people feel they can and cannot do....It’s just not something that they’re raised with or grow up thinking. And so, you know, supporting organizations and supporting initiatives, that changes that mindset.”

I. Pena

across racial groups. However, when identifying barriers for themselves, we noticed differences across racial groups. Only one of the 16 White individuals (6.3 percent) identified intersubjective limitations, while four of the eight Asian individuals (50 percent), one of the two Black individuals (50 percent), seven of the 13 Latino individuals (58.3 percent), and one of the four Middle Eastern/North African individuals (25 percent) did. In particular, we found that feelings related to imposter syndrome were named by seven individuals (15.2 percent). Although some may perceive imposter syndrome to be a deeply personal “issue,” it was in fact related to cultural and environmental barriers.

We found I. Pena’s comment (p. 54) insightful, particularly her connection between whom individuals regard as their city council civic leaders, who has the financial resources to volunteer for government work, and how that impacts the perception of who belongs in government for individuals from non-White backgrounds.

We intentionally end our discussion of the findings by noting barriers and the effects of the imposter syndrome, highlighting the system of interdependent variables affecting the participation of immigrants on these decision-making bodies and linking the challenges and opportunities they faced with other critical components present or missing in their respective localized community and the state at large. The barriers discussed by our participants influence our policy recommendations.

Discussion and Policy Recommendations: Illuminating the Black Box of Participation

It is clear from this research that involving members of the public in formal acts of governance is a common practice across jurisdictional levels. This practice has the potential to be transformative on multiple levels: for immigrant individuals serving; for the communities their decisions influence; and, subsequently, for the communities the individuals may represent. Knowing full well that meaningful bureaucratic diversity is rare across the state of Oregon (Nishishiba, 2012), these bodies may be one of the few outlets for immigrant communities to affect policy deliberation, influence, creation, and implementation. Yet, as this study illustrates, the vastness of decision-making bodies in Oregon reveals a practice that is not as transparent as it should be. For a variety of reasons, this lack of

transparency motivated us to present our detailed methodology in this chapter. First, if information is challenging to access in a mostly rural state like Oregon—and if we treat our study results as a baseline—then it seems safe to assume that such access challenges would be multiplied exponentially in states with more rural jurisdictions and larger rural populations. We base this assumption in part on how it was most difficult to document the demographic composition of board members at the county level.

This leads us to the second purpose of presenting our methodology. All of the bodies covered in this study are subject to public records laws. As such, their membership should be easily discernible by any member of the public who wants to know who is involved in decisions that impact their lives and communities. Yet, this was not the case. Staff collaboration with the research team to compile the demographic information for these bodies ranged from enthusiastic collaboration to active resistance or dismissiveness toward the research altogether.

This lack of transparency in relation to representation leads to the third reason for detailing our methodology and being explicit about the messiness and incompleteness of our inventories. Without readily available information about who sits on various bodies across the state, we find claims made by jurisdictions that their decision-making bodies are representative of the communities they serve difficult to believe. In fact, our research indicates that often this is not the case—or, worse, that there is no practical way for the public to confirm these claims given the lack of publicly accessible information. Of course, board membership is just one variable among many that influence civic participation on these bodies.

In concluding our analysis, we offer some initial policy recommendations:

Act more transparently

Government websites, regardless of jurisdictional type, should include a page that describes the goals and objectives of said bodies, including their decision-making authority and application information. Additionally, all current members of the body should be listed on the site, along with the contact information for the staff liaison to the body.

Put a face to a name

Beyond just names, a short biography of each member goes a long way toward creating a sense of transparency for the body and its representation. This is more than is required by law and focuses on actualizing the spirit of engaging in democratic practice.

Move beyond mere communication

Targeted outreach is good for recruiting members from underrepresented communities, but more concerted efforts should be made to extend already known networks to the wider community when vacancies become available. This should be accompanied with information about the application and selection processes. Moreover, this targeted outreach must be culturally relevant and specific, including the translation of materials and specification of the types of accommodations provided to reduce barriers to board service. The translation of applications is only relevant if resources are provided to remove language barriers from non-English-speaking participants on an ongoing basis. If these are not available, then the translation of an application is likely to be interpreted as a superficial effort by jurisdictions to merely appear accessible.

Create cohort-based leadership training

As our participants made clear, targeted efforts to discuss open positions on boards with non-White immigrants would go much further than advertisements of any kind. In this regard, we suggest that jurisdictions invest in, collaborate with, and sponsor trainings that are akin to the formal ones that this research highlights as making a difference for expanding immigrants' skills, knowledge, dispositions, and access to networks. These efforts could include providing stipends for participants, offering child-care, and opening pathways not only for employment but also volunteer positions.

Enact term limits

We also suggest that jurisdictions that do not already have some form of term limits for board service consider the value of having a good balance between returning and new participants. This will force jurisdictions to reflect continually on who is at the table and to prevent particular individuals from dominating group processes and/or knowledge or becoming overstretched across boards. Additionally, term limits provide guideposts geared towards

supporting board members reflecting on what networks they want to make connections with to fill future openings.

Recognize the connection between onboarding and inclusion

Onboarding of new members is key because it orients them to the mission and goals of board service. However, it is equally important to provide space for new and old board members to get to know each other. Creating a culture of inclusion is key for developing relationships and a subsequent community of practice for members of the body. In fact, our data suggest that those boards that were able to find the right balance between the formal and informal had created spaces for relationship building, for reflection on the board's goals and future plans, and for better interpersonal relations. These activities should be paired with the onboarding process of new individuals, whose initial impressions during onboarding establish expectations and comfort levels while providing an excellent opportunity for returning board members to engage in reflection.

Create a mentor system to support new members

A number of our participants talked about the sink-or-swim mentality of some board cultures. We recommend that jurisdictions create a mentor system to prevent individuals from sinking and to decrease the amount of time it takes for them to become comfortable, contributing members of their respective boards. As with any good mentorship program, significant time and thought should be given to how it would function, as opposed to just pairing individuals without any training or expectations.

Acknowledge and affirm the value of equity training

Among our participants, the value of equity trainings, either prior to or during board service, was not lost on individuals. We recommend that all boards engage in equity trainings that are scheduled regularly in a manner that works for their members' particular needs (e.g., every two years, during onboarding of new members, etc.). Issues of equity, access, and privilege should not be seen as just the domain of certain boards but as a central tenet to all.

Reconsider organizational procedures and rules that act as barriers

We cannot overstate the need for jurisdictions to mitigate the intimidation that formal adherence to Robert's Rules of Order poses for immigrants, especially those from non-White backgrounds. For bodies that must follow parliamentary procedures for conducting business, we fail to understand why all follow RRO even when Oregon statute does not prescribe it as the sole means of conducting business. We urge decision-making bodies to experiment with different procedures that may be more welcoming to non-White immigrants and to consider not using RRO simply because that is what they have always done. Of course, this may create a conundrum: if different bodies start using different parliamentary procedures, this may create even more of a cognitive demand for individuals who serve over time across multiple bodies. Given the push by Oregon Governor Kate Brown to prioritize equity at the state level, we recommend establishing a task force to simulate the cost and benefits of different jurisdictions, even the statewide bodies, moving to more user-friendly parliamentary procedures.

Develop accommodations that address the particular needs of immigrant participants

Without a doubt, the provision of resources that reduce or eliminate barriers faced by immigrants attempting to serve on decision-making bodies is critical. However, we do not recommend mandates alone, knowing full well that what may be a barrier for one person may not be for another, even if they have the same demographic profile. For example, one participant in our study did not like the real-time translation that was offered to her because it limited her cognitive processing in the moment, given the “extra voice” in her head. More importantly, jurisdictions should be transparent about what they provide, how they determine what is needed, and how they work with participants to make their service smoother. This transparency will reveal the intentionality that jurisdictions exercise in communicating the values, norms, and cultures of their decision-making bodies. One of the most powerful (but also most expensive and complicated) accommodations that jurisdictions could provide is childcare. One idea that a study participant proposed was offering stipends to pay for babysitters and pre-prepared meals for their children during meeting times. We believe this type of bottom-up problem solving can be effective if jurisdictions have

more intentional conversations with their members about challenges and opportunities.

We end our policy recommendations with a word about returning to face-to-face meetings. We expect organizations will use a combination of practices that were “normal” before and became more accepted during the pandemic. We expect that virtual conferencing (Zoom) will be used more frequently, which may mitigate the transportation and travel barriers identified by those sitting on statewide bodies. There will be many additional changes as the two norms fuse to create a new one in the immediate post-pandemic world. We encourage sponsoring jurisdictions of decision-making bodies to be intentional about what they maintain or relinquish in the service of making civic engagement in decision-making bodies by immigrants and other underrepresented populations more accessible and welcoming.

Concluding Thoughts

Two of the participants in our study noted that, initially, they did not think they could apply to serve on their decision-making body because the application had the word *citizen* in the title. Whether intentional or not, this denoted to them that even though they were interested, they could not apply to be of service to their communities because they were not traditional U.S. citizens. Luckily, once they were on the boards and shared their thoughts with those in power, they noticed that at some point *citizen* was dropped from the titles. For us, this is a rich example of the multiple variables that shape how welcome or inclusive communities feel to their immigrant members. We argue that our study confirms that the ability and motivation to serve on decision-making bodies represents a third type of civic engagement that helps complete the civic engagement trajectory of immigrants finding their voice in and for their communities.

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Daniel J. Tichenor

Department of Political Science and
Wayne Morse Center for Law and Politics
University of Oregon



Chapter Four

The Politics of Immigration in Oregon

Introduction

Few issues on the public agenda are more politically contentious for Oregon and the nation than those governing the lives of immigrants and refugees. One key reason is that policy choices about immigration and noncitizen rights lie at the heart of defining collective identity and shared interests, spurring intense debates over who belongs in the *demos* or political community (Fuchs 1990; Tichenor 2002; Cohen 2009). These official decisions can be transformative, since major shifts in the size and composition of new arrivals have the potential to upend the social, economic, cultural, and political *status quo* at both the state and national level. The politics of race looms especially large in these struggles over immigration, collective identity, and belonging (Higham 1955; Masuoka and Junn 2013; Lee 2019). A second major source of conflict over immigration, especially during the past decade, is partisan polarization (McCarty 2019). In the past, elected officials worked across party lines to address legal and policy challenges concerning immigrants, negotiating compromise packages and forging majority coalitions able to enact reform legislation. Yet the divide between Democrats and Republicans in both Oregon and national politics on immigration has grown dramatically in recent years, creating fault lines that render bipartisan policy innovation elusive. A final source of political tension stems from immigration federalism, which refers to the shared power of federal, state, and local governments in regulating the lives and livelihoods of immigrants and refugees. Despite federal preeminence in immigration matters, states can shape immigrant inclusion or exclusion in numerous ways, from issuing business licenses to providing health and welfare services (Gulasekaram and Ramakrishnan 2015). The decades-long failure of Congress to enact comprehensive immigration reform has led Oregon and other states to fill the void with many of their own policies addressing the rights and needs of immigrants and refugees residing within their borders, including those that may create friction with national policymakers and enforcement agencies.

Each of these sources of conflict—battles over race and belonging, partisan polarization, and intergovernmental struggle—has significantly influenced the dynamics of contemporary immigration politics in Oregon. This was on vivid display from 2017 to 2021, when Oregon’s elected Democratic leaders mounted vocal and determined resistance to the Trump administration as it sought to impose sweeping restrictions across federal immigration and refugee policy. Exercising broad executive power to curry favor with his conservative Republican base and promote his “America First” policy, President Donald Trump barred most Muslim immigrants, expanded enforcement efforts, pushed for a southern border wall, attempted to end Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), curbed refugee admissions, penalized noncitizens who received government assistance, and initiated family separation at the border (Milkis and Tichenor 2019). Oregon Democrats—in control of the Governor’s office, the Attorney General’s office, and the statehouse—openly challenged these unilateral administrative actions in the courts and in the implementation process. These political leaders sought to defend not only the one in ten Oregonians who were immigrants—the large majority of whom traced

their origins to Latin American or Asian countries—but also the state’s estimated 110,000 undocumented population (Pew Research Center 2018).

During this crucial four-year period, Oregon’s status as a “sanctuary state” gained prominent attention as its Democratic leaders at all levels of government vowed to guard the rights of immigrants and asylees within their borders and to resist federal immigration enforcement efforts. As we shall see, voters by a large margin affirmed the state’s sanctuary policy in 2018, revealing the extent to which Oregon in recent years has aligned politically with efforts to protect and integrate its diverse and fast-growing immigrant population which rose 31 percent between 1990 and 2018 (Pew Research Center, 2018). Yet strong support for immigrant rights and inclusive policies from Oregon’s most powerful political leaders and many of its voters is a very recent development. Today, as in the past, these policies have been opposed by a potent state-level restriction movement as well as by many elected officials and voters outside of the state’s liberal population centers of the Willamette Valley. Moreover, for most of the twenty-first century, political leaders and voters from both parties developed a checkered record on questions of immigrant inclusion, oscillating between policies that affirmed or rejected key immigrant rights and opportunities. Historically, Oregon’s immigration politics reflected traditions of white conquest, economic development, and xenophobic nativism. To understand the state’s political evolution on immigration—especially its recent commitment to defend the rights and democratic inclusion of a diverse immigrant population—it is useful to examine over time significant changes in how Oregon policymakers decide who belongs, how partisanship shapes their choices, and when federal priorities influence outcomes. This essay does so by analyzing these three sources of conflict and change in Oregon immigration politics during three historical periods: (1859-1990); the 1990s and 2000s (1991-2010) and the past decade (2011-2020).

Foundations: The Evolving Politics of Immigration in Oregon (1859-2000)

Like other western U.S. territories, Oregon’s push for statehood rested upon the dispossession, genocide, and forced removal of indigenous peoples by white settlers (Spores 1993; Beckham 2003). It also was the only state

admitted to the Union (in 1859) with an exclusion clause prohibiting Black people from owning property or making contracts, and its legislature subsequently refused to ratify the 15th Amendment removing racial barriers on the right to vote (Brooks 2004; Nokes 2013). Oregon’s early leaders hoped to lure European newcomers to the state, looking to immigrant recruitment as a tool for settling and building a prosperous, white-ruled utopia on the Pacific coast. To this end, like many other states, the Oregon legislature supported a State Board of Immigration during the late nineteenth-century to encourage European newcomers to permanently settle in the Northwest, where they could help develop a “producing and consuming population” that capitalized on the region’s abundant natural resources. In particular, the state’s immigrant recruiters devoted most of their energy to attracting northern and western Europeans, who they saw as “the best of foreign-born immigrants” (Bussel and Tichenor 2017). By the turn of the century, immigrants comprised 15 percent of Oregon’s population, and most originated from Germany, England, Sweden, Norway, Ireland, Austria, and Finland (Statistics for Oregon, 1910). Although ethnic and racial hierarchies shaped how early Oregon policymakers viewed immigration, Jewish immigrants from Germany attained significant influence in the state’s economic, social, and political life, achieving notable success in winning elections from the 1860s through the 1910s as city mayors, city councilors, state legislators, and U.S. congressional representatives (Toll 1982; Lowenstein 1987; Eisenberg 2016).

Chinese exclusion also figured prominently in early Oregon immigration politics, as white labor organizations, anti-Chinese associations, and political leaders of both parties followed national trends by supporting draconian federal exclusion laws. In cities and towns across the state during the late nineteenth century, Chinese immigrants were terrorized by white mob violence and random murders (Lee 2021). By the 1910s and 1920s, Oregon’s political establishment also embraced innovations in federal immigration policy that drastically restricted southern and eastern European immigration through national origins quotas. At the same time as Congress hired a “eugenics agent” who offered data on the purported *racial* inferiority of Italians, Russians, Greeks, Hungarians, and other “new” immigrants, Oregon’s opinion leaders warned in the 1920s that the state should keep out



Chinese emigrants and sailors denied entrance to U.S., 1946. Photo: Oregon Historical Society Research Library

those from “less fit nations,” since only “Americanism and Anglo-Saxonism” guaranteed social and political cohesion (Higham 1955; Saolfield 1984). These nativist views were amplified in Oregon by the Ku Klux Klan, which exercised considerable influence in the state during the 1920s. The Oregon legislature enacted an Alien Land Law in 1923 that reflected intense racial animus toward Japanese farmers and prohibited noncitizens from land ownership. During the Second World War, Oregon officials cooperated with federal authorities in the relocation and internment of the state’s Japanese Americans. Although resisted by Oregon educators, clergy, ethnic associations, and civil rights groups, Japanese internment was endorsed by key veterans’ groups, patriotic organizations, and political leaders in the state (Bussel and Tichenor 2017).

As much as Oregon immigration politics conformed with the racist and nativist tempers that produced policies like Asian exclusion, national origins quotas, and Japanese internment at the federal level, it also responded to employ-

er demands for Mexican migrant labor beginning in the 1940s. Small numbers of Mexicans were recruited to the state as railroad and farm workers in the early twentieth century, but became victims of job discrimination and deportation campaigns during the Great Depression (Garcia 2021). After U.S. entry into the Second World War, Oregon agricultural communities faced a dire labor shortage. Local newspapers urged all able-bodied residents to help farmers in harvesting crops, and schools closed early to enable students to get out into the fields. Oregon growers and politicians eventually looked to Mexican contract labor, initiated by a 1942 bilateral agreement between the United States and Mexico called the Bracero Program. Thousands of Mexican *braceros* toiled in Oregon fields and forests during the war; their performance illustrated to Oregon farmers the value of Mexican migrant laborers as a cheap and productive source of fieldwork (Gamboa 1990). As the number of braceros in the state declined in the late-1940s, the Oregonian noted that “the farmer can again pick his cherries without wondering how to say

it in Spanish.” Yet the reverse was in fact true: Oregon growers now looked to Mexican-Americans (mostly from Texas and California) and Mexican nationals to provide a reliable supply of labor. The resulting migration networks expanded the number of Latinos working and permanently settling in Oregon during the 1950s and 1960s; between 1940 and 1970, the state’s Latinx population grew from an estimated 1,280 to 32,000. These newcomers reflected a mix of transplanted Mexican Americans and both legal and undocumented Mexican immigrants who encountered varied forms of discrimination and isolation in the white communities that benefited economically from their labor (Sifuentes, 2016; Garcia 2021).

In the postwar decades, Democratic Senator Wayne Morse fought hard to expand immigration opportunities at the national level, while Republican Mark Hatfield began his long political career by challenging segregated public accommodations at the state level (Smith 1962; Drukman 1997; Etulain 2021). Most members of Oregon’s congressional delegations joined bipartisan majorities

to enact federal policy reforms such as the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (INA) that increased refugee admissions and dismantled racist national origins quotas in favor of a more generous visa system based on family reunification and economic merit. The INA spurred Asian and Latin American immigration. Oregon also became a refugee resettlement site for Russians and Ukrainians from the 1960s through the 1980s, and for Southeast Asian and African refugees from the 1970s onward. Refugee families making new homes in Oregon received considerable assistance from faith-based organizations and other private groups (Bussel and Tichenor 2017).

Yet the politics of immigration in Oregon was dominated in these decades by the flow of Mexican workers into the state—both authorized and undocumented. Latinos in Oregon were deeply engaged in both the civil rights movement and labor movement, forming the United Farm Workers of Oregon in 1968 to fight for improved labor conditions for farmworkers. During the same period, the Valley Migrant League was a private, nonprofit organi-



Former Oregon Rep. Rocky Barilla stands beside his old desk on the floor of the Oregon House of Representatives. Barilla wrote Oregon’s sanctuary statute in 1987. Photo: Celeste Noche, Portland Street Roots

zation founded by the Oregon Council of Churches that provided migrant farm workers better access to public services and education, and also played an instrumental role in strengthening Latino communities and Chicano leadership in western Oregon. In 1977, a new legal aid organization, the Willamette Valley Immigration Project (WVIP), emerged as a formidable defender of Latinx reforestation and farm workers in both labor conflicts and federal immigration enforcement procedures. With support from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and other groups, the WVIP devoted special attention to protecting undocumented workers whose precarious legal status often subjected them to exploitation by unscrupulous contractors and employers (Sifuentes 2016). As a further sign of Oregon's gradual diversification, voters in 1979 elected as governor Victor Atiyeh, a second-generation Arab American who was the proud son of Syrian immigrants and who served until 1987 (Mapes 2019). The Asian population of Oregon also grew from 34,773 in 1980 (1.3 percent) to 69,289 (2.4 percent) in 1990 (Ma 2017).

During the 1980s, as Oregon's Latinx population grew by 70 percent to 112,707 (nearly 4 percent of the state's total population), the WVIP and a small group of reforestation and farm workers sought to build a new union to protect their interests in the fields and to mobilize politically. In 1985, these activists created *Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste* (Northwest Tree Planters and Farm Workers United, known as PCUN), which forged alliances at the state and national levels with other unions, ethnic organizations, supportive religious associations, and civil rights and immigrant rights groups. Together this coalition successfully fought English-only legislation and efforts to deny public benefits and legal rights to unauthorized immigrants. When Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA), PCUN and other non-profit organizations helped tens of thousands of undocumented Oregonians gain legal status under the law's amnesty and seasonal agricultural worker programs (Sarathy 2012; Sifuentes 2016).

One year later, the Oregon legislature considered a measure developed by the ACLU, PCUN, and other advocacy groups that would prohibit the state's local law enforcement officers from enforcing federal immigration laws against people not suspected of any criminal activities. The bill was sponsored by Representative Rocky Barilla

(D-Salem), the state's first elected Latinx legislator, who as a Marion-Polk Legal Aid Services attorney one decade earlier represented a Mexican-American resident of Independence after he was interrogated about his immigration status by local law enforcement officers. From his lawsuit, Barilla learned that Polk County sheriffs regularly patrolled Latino neighborhoods, detained people they thought were undocumented immigrants on the basis of presumed race or ethnic origin, and turned them over to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) for potential removal. Barilla's legislative proposal won broad bipartisan support in the Oregon statehouse, passing easily in both chambers as a law that would discourage both racial profiling and using precious local resources to enforce federal statutes. With only two dissenting votes in the House and Senate, the legislature made Oregon the nation's first sanctuary state (Murguia, 2018; Barilla, 2020).

For much of its history, Oregon was a bastion for white conquest and control, a place where its relatively small population of Asian, Black, and Latino residents endured segregation, violence, and second-class status. Elected officials from both major parties in the state embraced northern and western European immigration for generations, but saw other newcomers as unfit for their society. In this way, Oregon immigration politics generally followed trends in national policymaking from the Chinese Exclusion Acts of the 1880s to the racist national origins quota system that prevailed for most of the twentieth century. Yet key federal immigration reforms—most notably the INA of 1965 and IRCA of 1986—enabled millions of immigrants, mostly from Asian and Latin American countries of origin, to settle in the United States in the late twentieth century, including tens of thousands in Oregon. Moreover, as noted, growers and other businesses in the state increasingly relied on Mexican migrant labor from World War II onward, spurring new migratory patterns, demographic change, and fresh labor and civil rights activism that recast Oregon immigration politics in the 1980s. In the next decade, however, stronger battle lines formed on either side of the issue.

Polarized: Undocumented Immigrants and Oregon Politics (1991-2010)

Political conflict over immigration in Oregon became more persistent and organized in the 1990s with the for-

mation of two prominent advocacy groups representing rival policy agendas: Oregonians for Immigration Reform (OFIR) and Causa. OFIR emerged as part of a national immigration restriction movement led by the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR). Like other groups in the movement, OFIR traces its origins to the causes of environmental protection and population control, calling for “an environmentally sustainable level of immigration” (Reimers 1992; Mesh 2017). Yet its primary advocacy work has focused almost entirely on the state’s undocumented population, calling for significant restrictions on the rights of unauthorized immigrants and for state and local cooperation with federal enforcement agencies to arrest and remove this population. At the other end of the political spectrum, Causa was founded in 1995 by farmworkers, Latinos, immigrants, and various progressive groups—with PCUN serving as the primary sponsor—to serve as a political organization for immigrant rights and Latinx mobilization. Focused on “working towards legislation that would improve the lives of the immigrant community,” Causa spearheaded efforts to build pro-immigrant coalitions, lobby elected officials, and develop voter support for immigrant-friendly reforms in Oregon. Early on, Causa, PCUN, and other groups mobilized in 1996 to defeat efforts by grower interests to exempt farmworkers from receiving minimum wages (Causa 2021). In later policy struggles, however, key immigrant employer groups—such as the nursery, restaurant, and lodging industries—joined Causa and other progressive organizations in defending noncitizen rights.

Although immigrant policy polarized advocacy groups in Oregon politics during the 1990s, the battle lines among elected officials did not initially reflect clear partisan differences. In 1992, for example, Republican Senator Mark Hatfield took to the Senate floor to denounce the xenophobia of a revived immigration restriction movement. “Our nation of immigrants, the melting pot of the world, is dangerously close to providing a license to hate,” he declared in defense of immigrants, echoing views that his Democratic predecessor Wayne Morse had argued in the postwar years: “Oregon, for one, simply cannot afford to do so” (Ulrich and Ota, 1992). During the mid-1990s, bipartisan majorities of the state legislature considered and repeatedly rejected proposals to deny educational and welfare benefits to immigrants—measures that were enacted in other states. During Oregon’s highly competitive open 1996 Senate race, both Representative Ron

Wyden (D) and state Senate President Gordon Smith (R) vigorously defended immigrant rights, particularly access to government services, including welfare, at a time when a new restrictionist movement sought to deny public benefits to noncitizens. Wyden regularly reminded voters that he was the son of immigrants who vehemently opposed “immigrant bashing.” Smith, a frozen foods company owner, talked openly about the immigrants he employed and warned that punitive policies toward undocumented immigrants in the state, most of whom were from Mexico and other Latin American countries, would create “a racial police state” where “people are under suspicion because of the color of their skin” (Lane, 1996; Hogan 2006). Yet candidates of both parties sometimes advanced anti-immigrant appeals. In the competitive 1996 contest in House District 1 (suburban Portland), both incumbent Democratic Representative Elizabeth Furse and Republican challenger Bill Witt called for crackdowns on unauthorized immigrants and the deportation of legal immigrants who received welfare benefits for at least twelve months during their first seven years in the U.S. “I do believe that a country looks out for its own citizens first,” Furse declared despite opposition from Causa and PCUN. “We must control illegal immigration” (Suo, 1996). During this period, Oregon’s political leaders expressed strong views about immigration, but their positions generally defied any consistent party line.

For much of the 1990s, Oregon’s politics and policies were far more receptive to immigrant inclusion than at the federal level or in neighboring states like California (Jacobson 2008), where populist discontent with unauthorized immigration led to punitive measures like the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA). After Congress imposed new limits on welfare benefits for legal immigrants, a bipartisan majority of Oregon lawmakers voted to expand state spending to preserve this public assistance (Green and Suo, 1997). By the start of the twenty-first century, Oregon, a state that was founded upon racial conquest, exclusion, and hierarchy, saw its demographics being transformed by diverse immigration. Between 1991 and 2000, Oregon’s Asian population grew by 68 percent to comprise 3.7 percent of state’s population, while its Latinx population more than doubled to make up 8 percent of the overall population (Ma 2017; Garcia 2021). Amidst these demographic changes, new tensions emerged between the state and the federal government over immigrant rights and

enforcement. When federal immigration agents in the summer of 2000 stepped up enforcement efforts against undocumented immigrants in the Portland area, city and state officials demanded that the Immigration and Naturalization Service's (INS) District Chief be removed. City law enforcement also vowed not to cooperate with INS operations (Read and Sullivan 2000). In 2001, Causa, PCUN, and other state advocacy groups joined national unions, agribusinesses, and a broader immigrant rights coalition lobbying Congress to enact legislation granting legal status to several million undocumented farmworkers and their family members (PCUN 2021). However, fears about national security prompted by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 halted legislative momentum on immigration reform, and refocused immigration politics on enforcement and border control.

During the 2000s, bipartisan Congressional efforts to enact comprehensive immigration reform were repeatedly stymied by rightwing nativist groups such as Numbers USA and FAIR, conservative media pundits, an increasingly restriction-minded conservative base, and wary Republican lawmakers (Tichenor 2021a). These developments also filtered into Oregon politics, as growing partisan polarization recast the immigration debate at both the local and state levels. The 2003 struggles of Rep. Billy Dalto (R-Salem) to win in-state college tuition for all Oregon immigrant students is illustrative of these shifting partisan and ideological fault lines. The Legislature's only Latinx member and its youngest at 26, Dalto faced a firestorm of conservative grassroots opposition when he cosponsored a measure to extend in-state tuition benefits to undocumented students. In addition to angry letters, calls, and messages from voters, local conservative talk radio and right-wing groups lambasted Dalto for "shamefully" encouraging more unauthorized immigration and labeled him a RINO (Republican in Name Only). At the Capitol, Dalto's Republican colleagues derailed his bill in committee, leading him to propose a compromise offering in-state tuition only to students who were citizens or legal residents but ineligible because their parents were unauthorized immigrants, thereby excluding students who themselves were undocumented. Dalto later stormed out of Republican caucus meetings when his colleagues continued to resist even this watered-down proposal (Mayer 2003; Chuang 2003).

Oregon's growing political divide over immigration

flowed into the streets during the mid-2000s, as rival camps demonstrated in cities and towns across the state. When state agencies and the Mexican consulate organized "Carousals of Information" events in 2006 for an expanding Spanish-speaking population, OFIR protestors showed up to claim that undocumented immigrants illegitimately consumed millions of dollars of taxpayer-funded public benefits (Barnett, 2006). The same year, a large coalition of immigrant rights activists organized protests against draconian legislative proposals by U.S. House Republicans that would punish undocumented immigrants living in the country. Immigrant rights demonstrations in U.S. cities and towns from March through May drew an estimated 3.5 to 5 million supporters, including large marches in Portland, Salem, and Hood River (Beavan 2006; Zepeda-Millan 2017). Significantly, a broad array of Oregon business groups—including the agricultural, restaurant, and lodging industries—expressed support for providing undocumented immigrants a path to citizenship. "The workers and employers have a good relationship," an Oregon Restaurant Association spokesperson told reporters. In response, OFIR activists coordinated with state chapters of the extreme nativist Minutemen Civil Defense Corps to organize protests at day labor sites across the state, harassing and intimidating undocumented workers and potential employers. Immigrant rights groups reacted by joining undocumented day laborers, leading to confrontations with OFIR and Minuteman activists that required police intervention (Bermudez 2006; Green 2006; Skidmore 2006).

These grassroots conflicts between rival camps on immigration also became a prominent feature of partisan struggles in Salem and in statewide elections. During Oregon's 2006 campaign in races up and down the ticket, many Republican candidates branded opponents as soft on unauthorized immigration and endorsed a series of tough new restrictions, while Democrats responded by supporting stronger sanctions for employers who knowingly hired undocumented workers. When a new legislative session began in 2007, the partisan divide crystallized as Republican lawmakers proposed a flurry of bills to make English the official language of Oregon, require local law enforcement to assist INS enforcement efforts, and deny various public benefits to those who could not prove their legal status. Democratic leaders in control of both chambers questioned the urgency of the GOP proposals, arguing that they were cynically designed to get

“people very emotionally worked up without addressing a real problem” (Har 2007). Yet there was one key issue that Democratic officials could not easily evade: driver’s licenses for undocumented immigrants. By 2007, Oregon was one of only seven states that did not require proof of lawful presence to get a license. However, two years earlier, the federal government established new minimum-security standards in 2005 for identity documents based on recommendations of the 9/11 commission. To meet federal mandates, Democratic Governor Ted Kulongoski issued an executive order in 2007 requiring anyone seeking an Oregon driver’s license to provide a valid Social Security number or other proof of lawful presence in the country. Bipartisan majorities in Salem ultimately codified these new rules for driver’s licenses, despite opposition from Causa, key business groups, and progressive Democrats like Portland Rep. Tina Kotek, who argued that the law would harm undocumented families by pushing them “further into the shadows” (Har 2008).

Friction between Oregon and federal officials surfaced again in the summer of 2007 when more than 150 federal agents raided a North Portland food processing plant, arresting dozens of undocumented workers. Portland Mayor Tom Potter, joined by immigrant rights, civil rights, and religious advocates, strongly criticized the raid, reiterating that city police would not cooperate in federal enforcement efforts (Denson and Hunsberger 2007). Months earlier, the Portland City Council created a special task force to foster “the inclusion of immigrants and refugees in civic and public life,” while denouncing failures in federal immigration policies that marginalized noncitizens (City of Portland, 2006). After English-only bills proposed by Republican legislators failed in 2007, Oregon voters in 2008 overwhelmingly rejected a ballot measure favored by OFIR and conservative sponsors to stringently limit bilingual education. In Salem the following year, a diverse coalition of pro-immigration advocates, including Causa, business interests, unions, faith groups, and civil rights organizations, mobilized against Republican and OFIR efforts to enact a variety of restrictions on immigrant rights. These advocates found broad support among Democratic majorities in both the House and Senate, which turned back each GOP bill that might harm immigrants and their children (Silva 2015). By 2010, the partisan and ideological divides over immigration had become a defining feature of Oregon politics, replicating similar dynamics playing out nationwide.

Immigrant Oregon and the Quest for Inclusion (2011-present)

During the past decade, the politics of immigration in Oregon has undergone significant, if not dramatic, transformation. In a state with a persistent history of white domination, battles over race and belonging have been recast by Oregon’s growing demographic diversity and by an expanding political coalition supporting immigrant rights. Partisan polarization on immigration policy also has grown more pronounced over the course of the decade, as each major party has advanced starkly different agendas in Salem after a flicker of bipartisanship in 2013. Finally, intergovernmental struggle reached a new zenith during the Trump administration, as the state’s Democratic leadership fervently resisted draconian federal policies imposed by unilateral presidential action. In recent years, immigrants have grown to 10.2 percent of the Oregon’s total population (16th highest proportion in the nation and more than double the 4.9 percent of foreign-born in 1990). Most of these immigrants trace their origins to Mexico (36 percent), China (6 percent), Vietnam (5 percent), India (5 percent), and the Philippines (5 percent), contributing to Oregon’s expanding and increasingly diverse population as Asians and Latinos became the fastest growing demographic groups in the state. While roughly half of Oregon’s foreign-born have become naturalized citizens, an estimated 26 percent of the state’s immigrant residents are undocumented persons (MPI Data Hub 2017; Pew Research Center 2018). As has been true for much of the contemporary period, policies governing these unauthorized immigrants have driven most of the state’s political debate and activism on this issue in recent years.

Educational opportunities for undocumented young people became an important flashpoint in statewide immigration politics in the early 2010s. In particular, access to in-state college tuition rates for Oregon high school graduates who were unable to prove legal residence produced familiar divides in Salem. Senate Education Committee hearings on the issue in 2011 drew overflow crowds who filled a hearing room, three additional spaces, and the lobby outside the House and Senate chambers. Legislators heard emotional testimony from young Dreamers, who tearfully told legislators that they could not afford to attend the state’s public universities when non-resident tuition rates were three times the in-state price tag. “The most precious thing for me is my education,” explained



May Day Rally at the Oregon State Capitol, Photo: Causa

Jessica Garcia, a North Eugene High School student with a 3.7 grade-point average. “Without tuition equity, my dream of being a microbiologist may be taken away.” In response, OFIR lobbyists argued that it would be unfair to charge U.S. citizens from out of state three times more than they charge residents who live here without authorization. “How is it that people can break the law and get a benefit?” OFIR’s Cynthia Kendoll asked. “I don’t get that concept” (Graves and Cole, 2011). In 2011 and 2012, tuition equity bills went nowhere due to split partisan control of the statehouse, with Oregon voters in 2010 creating divided government by narrowly reelecting Democratic Governor John Kitzhaber and a Democratic Senate, while yielding the first evenly split House (30-30 tie) in state history. Split partisan control of the House enabled Republican opponents to bury the bill in committee. As a pivotal GOP committee chair explained to reporters in justifying this action, he and his colleagues received an outpouring of mail, phone calls, and other feedback from

conservative constituents favoring the bill’s defeat (Cole 2011; Monaghan 2012).

After a decade of failed reform efforts, the structural opportunities for tuition equity legislation changed markedly in 2013. One of the most influential developments was 2012 election results that handed Democrats super majorities in both chambers of the Oregon Legislature. Equally important, House and Senate Democratic leaders were committed to making immigrant rights initiatives an early and important legislative priority. This agenda also enjoyed strong support from incumbent Democratic Governor John Kitzhaber, as well as some Republican legislators. In addition to the electoral gains of Oregon Democrats in 2012, the expanding organizational and coalitional capacities of the state’s immigrant rights movement clearly emerged (Zheng 2013a). Not only did Causa and its allies ramp up voter registration efforts during the campaign, but minority and immigrant rights groups,

including the Urban League, the Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon, the Center for Intercultural Organizing (which later became Unite Oregon), and Causa, coordinated on broad reform goals and lobbying efforts. Kayse Jama, the executive director of the Center for Intercultural Organizing and a Somali refugee who settled in Portland in 1998, explained in 2013 that this new coalition of minority and immigrant rights groups “changed the makeup of Salem” and initiated “a cultural shift in the Capitol where people of color are talking with elected officials and asking about taking action and addressing issues that are most important to our community.” These groups reminded legislators that racial minorities, including Latinos, comprised 22 percent of Oregonians according to census figures, and that they represented the fastest growing segments of the state’s population (Zheng 2013b). Tuition equity reform also had strong backing from a range of Oregon businesses including nurseries, wine growers, dairy farmers, timber companies, and restaurant and hotel owners. Finally, at the national level, bipartisan compromise in the U.S. Senate briefly enhanced the potential for serious consideration of comprehensive immigration reform (Nakamura and O’Keefe, 2014).

Just three weeks into the Oregon Legislature’s 77th session that began in 2013, state representatives voted 38-18 in favor of House Bill 2787 granting in-state tuition rates to undocumented Oregon students. All 33 Democrats present voted for the bill, a reflection of the party’s alliance with immigrant rights groups. They were joined by five Republicans who were swayed by business lobbies and Dreamers who argued that immigrant access to higher education would benefit the state’s long-term interests. HB 2787 promised in-state tuition rates for undocumented students who had lived in the country for five years or more, studied at an Oregon high school for at least three years and successfully graduated, and showed intent to become a legal permanent resident by applying to the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program initiated by President Barack Obama in 2012 or by providing a comparable statement of intent. The Senate then passed HB 2787 on a 19-11 vote, endorsed by all 16 Democratic senators and 3 of 14 Republicans. Republican opponents like Senate Tim Knopp (R-Bend) complained that the majority was rewarding those who broke the nation’s immigration laws, contending that “folks who believe in the Constitution, who believe in the rule of law, need to

be represented today.” When the vote was completed, immigrant rights supporters who packed the Senate’s upper galleries, including many young Dreamers, silently and dramatically stood with linked hands in a semicircle above the lawmakers. The tuition equity law that took ten years to get approved was signed by Governor Kitzhaber in April of 2013, making Oregon one of a dozen states allowing undocumented students from local high schools to attend public universities at lower rates reserved for residents (Zheng 2013c).

On the same day HB 2787 was codified into law, legislation that would grant four-year driving privileges to undocumented state residents was introduced in the Oregon Senate. Two years earlier, amidst divided government, Governor Kitzhaber had created a bipartisan task force to revisit the issue of driver’s privileges for those unable to prove legal residence. Although the REAL ID Act of 2005 asserted a strong federal interest in improving the reliability of state-issued identification documents for national security reasons, Oregon policymakers faced a strong backlash from both business and immigrant rights groups after they passed SB 1080 in 2008 requiring proof of citizenship or legal presence to obtain a driver’s license. Kitzhaber’s new task force brought together state officials, police chiefs, immigrant rights groups, clergy, agricultural businesses, service industry representatives, and labor unions while intentionally excluding OFIR and other anti-immigrant groups (Silva 2015). The SB 833 driver card legislation introduced in the spring of 2013 evolved from the negotiations of the governor’s two-year working group. Restrictionist groups hoped to upend the bill by recalling the national security imperatives that fueled the 2008 law requiring proof of US citizenship or legal presence to obtain driving privileges. “The most important document a dangerous terrorist can possess is a driver’s license,” warned OFIR’s Jim Ludwick. Nonetheless, large majorities in the House and Senate that included both Democrats and a small number of Republicans voted to create four-year driver’s cards for unauthorized residents. Governor Kitzhaber signed the measure into law with great fanfare at a May Day rally on the Capitol steps, cheered on by several thousand attendees at a rally to celebrate immigrant inclusion (Hammond and Zheng 2013; Zheng 2013d). The legislation made Oregon the fifth state to grant undocumented immigrants driving privileges.

Marginalized in the Democratic-controlled Legislature, Oregonians for Immigration Reform received help from out-of-state donors and anti-immigrant groups to place a referendum, Measure 88, on the November 2014 ballot challenging the SB 833 driver card law (Gaston 2014). During the 2014 campaign, Oregon’s Republican Political Action Committees (PACs) ran negative ads assailing Democratic incumbents for the driver card law, while GOP candidates for statewide office endorsed tougher enforcement against undocumented residents over granting new rights. At the same time, the minority of Republican legislators who supported tuition equity or driver cards for unauthorized immigrants were rebuffed by key conservative donors and faced primary challenges. “The vocal faction of the party is saying that immigration is a bad thing and that we need to follow the rule of law,” one Republican insider explained. “Then there’s the agricul-

tural and business community saying, ‘Heck no. We need this. People need to drive to their jobs’” (Tims 2014a). Employer and immigrant rights groups teamed to protect driver’s cards, but Oregon voters repealed the measure by a 66 to 34 percent count, rejecting it in every county except left-leaning Multnomah where the margin of support was only 8 percent. Analysts noted that proponents of the driver card law placed too much emphasis on safer roads due to more licensed and insured drivers, and spent too little energy on explaining how the law overcame major hardships for undocumented immigrants. (Mesh 2014; Tims 2014b).

In the wake of the Measure 88 struggle, Oregon immigrant rights and civil rights groups pointed to another important challenge: the lack of racial diversity among state-level elected officials. Causa, Unite Oregon, the



Portland International Airport protest to Donald Trump’s Immigration Ban in 2017, Photo: Joe Riedl, Willamette Week

Urban League, the Asian Pacific American Network, and other coalition members effectively worked together in Salem to promote social and racial justice reforms. Yet the disparity between the state's changing demography and its nearly all-white Legislature raised concerns for movement activists. Although census figures indicated that Latinos, Asians, Blacks, and other racial minorities had grown to 23 percent of the state's population, the Legislature remained 96 percent white (the 90-member Legislature in 2015 included two Latinos and two African Americans). "In terms of racial inclusiveness, the Legislature is not there yet, and in many ways, the interest and needs of our community are not as well-represented as they could be," observed Alberto Moreno of the Oregon Latino Health Coalition (Kullgren 2015a).

With Democrats in control of the Legislature from 2014 onward and firmly committed to immigrant integration, Republican lawmakers and restrictionist groups in 2016 sponsored new ballot measure proposals targeting undocumented residents. During a campaign in which GOP presidential candidate Donald Trump attacked Mexican immigrants as dangerous criminals and promised a southern border wall, a "Muslim ban," and mass deportations, Republicans and OFIR activists endorsed proposals that would make English the state's official language, increase worker verification requirements, and toughen voter registration requirements. None of these proposals became ballot measures for Oregon voters to decide, however, as restrictionists failed to replicate their 2014 strategy due to a Democratic voter majority that had grown more supportive of immigrant rights. At the same time, 2016 election returns produced a clear divide between a new Trump administration committed to advancing draconian immigration and refugee policies and elected Democratic leaders holding statewide offices in Oregon dedicated to resisting those policies (Kullgren 2015b; Hogen 2016). The clash would yield unprecedented intergovernmental and partisan conflict over immigration.

The struggle between Oregon officials and the Trump administration surfaced only days after the presidential inauguration. One of President Trump's first executive orders (EO 13769) signed on January 27, 2017 banned refugee resettlement and immigration from seven predominantly Muslim countries. Decried as a "Muslim ban," the order was denounced by members of Congress,

major corporations, human rights and civil rights groups, religious leaders, and universities. More than 900 U.S. diplomats registered their disapproval in a dissent cable to the White House, and thousands of protestors demonstrated against the order at airports nationwide, including Portland International Airport. Oregon's top elected law enforcement official, Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum (D), blasted the order as illegal and racially bigoted. "Here in Oregon, we welcome and honor our immigrants, who add so much to the quality of our lives," she declared in an official statement. "This order shuts out Oregonians' families, instills a culture of fear, and demeans many of our most hard-working and talented neighbors and friends." Oregon then joined other states in filing a U.S. District Court lawsuit, arguing that the travel and immigration ban would harm Oregon businesses, residents, universities, health care, and the state's economy (Jaquiss 2017; Selsky 2017).

Oregon's status as a "sanctuary state" harkening back to the 1987 bipartisan law championed by Rocky Barilla fueled an even more contentious confrontation between state and federal officials during the Trump presidency. In early February of 2017, Democratic Governor Kate Brown issued an executive order prohibiting all state agencies and employees from assisting federal immigration enforcement efforts. Whereas Oregon law barred local and state law enforcement from using public resources to help Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials identify and apprehend undocumented immigrants, Brown's order expanded the constraint to all agencies and forbade discrimination on the basis of immigration status. "I am willing to do what's right to make sure we protect Oregonians," Brown said. "We protect our culture and we protect our economy" (Marum 2017). Brown's order came under immediate fire from Republican state legislators, who proposed bills to repeal the sanctuary law, require cities and towns to support federal ICE enforcement, and make English the official language of Oregon. Each of these bills was blocked by Democratic majorities, whose leadership denounced the measures as designed "to further divide and polarize our state, to scapegoat and threaten our immigrant populations" (Friedman 2017a). Oregon also became a target of Fox News commentators who branded the state as "a mecca for illegals," while interviewing disgruntled Republican state lawmakers (Friedman 2017b). At the same time, Trump administration of-

ficials threatened to withhold federal funds from Oregon if it refused to dismantle its sanctuary policy. In response, the state's Democratic congressional delegation—including U.S. Senators Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden, as well as U.S. Representatives Suzanne Bonamici, Earl Blumenauer, Kurt Schrader, and Peter DeFazio—warned federal agencies to stop challenging the state's sanctuary policies. "Oregon will not cave under this pressure," they wrote. "We're going to fight to keep our communities together" (Shepherd 2017).

Local Oregon communities also resisted plans for enhanced federal enforcement. In the city of Springfield during the summer of 2018, hundreds of pro-immigrant community members filled its council meeting room for weeks demanding that the city end its contract with US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to rent 100 municipal jail beds for undocumented immigrants. Acknowledging local opposition to "the fear, hatred, and just plain craziness at the national level," the city council capitulated to community pressure and terminated the ICE contract. At the same time, county commissions, city and town councils, school boards, and universities across the Willamette Valley endorsed sanctuary ordinances and resolutions that placed limits on levels of cooperation with ICE (Glucklich 2018).

Oregon again clashed with the federal executive branch in 2018 over its "zero tolerance policy" that separated migrant children from their parents at the U.S. southern border. The state joined a lawsuit challenging the family separation policies, and also filed an amicus brief intended to stop the Trump administration from rescinding Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for asylees from El Salvador, Haiti, and Honduras. In Portland, protestors camped and demonstrated outside an ICE facility, leading to numerous arrests (Shepherd 2018). Yet the biggest 2018 political showdown over immigration in Oregon focused on Ballot Measure 105, a referendum on the November ballot aiming to nullify the state's 31-year-old sanctuary law. Sponsored by three Republican state legislators and funded by OFIR and a Repeal Oregon Sanctuary Law Committee, Measure 105 enjoyed the support of Oregon sheriffs from rural and conservative portions of the state. Democratic leaders, immigrant rights and civil rights groups, unions, businesses, and law enforcement officials in the state's more populous and progressive counties mo-

bilized against the ballot measure. In the weeks prior to the midterm election, President Trump sought to energize his base by calling attention to a "migrant caravan" from Central America that allegedly was poised to bring drug gangs and terrorists to the U.S. Nearly 2 million Oregonians handed Democrats lopsided victories in the governor's and state legislative races and also rejected Measure 105 by a margin of 63 to 36 percent, upholding the state's sanctuary status. "We have done it!" the No on 105 campaign declared. "We have defended Oregon's values and said no to those who want to divide immigrant and non-immigrant Oregonians!" (Hammond 2018; Wilson 2018; Woodworth 2018). Seven months later, Democratic majorities in the Oregon House and Senate enacted new legislation—House Bill 2015—that once again allowed undocumented immigrants to obtain a driver's license (Lehman 2019).

The 2020 election reaffirmed Democratic dominance in Oregon, with the party winning supermajorities in the Legislature as well as the U.S. Senate race, four of five U.S. House seats, and every other statewide contest. During an era of partisan polarization where most Republicans aligned with immigration restrictionists and Democrats emerged as staunch immigrant defenders, the voting results were good news for the state's immigrant rights movement. The election also sent a more racially diverse set of elected representatives to Salem, helping to create a 12-member Black, Indigenous, and People of Color Caucus—including new state Senator Kayse Jama, the Unite Oregon executive director and Somali refugee who once lobbied the Legislature for immigrant rights and racial justice reform (Borrud 2021). After four years of dramatic confrontation between a progressive "sanctuary state" and a White House devoted to immigrant exclusion, Donald Trump's defeat in the presidential race and the new administration of Democrat Joe Biden predictably lowered the temperature of immigration federalism. In 2020 and 2021, the state Legislature also created an Oregon Worker Relief Fund and quarantine fund that provided \$40 million to support both authorized and undocumented immigrants who were denied federal aid (Goldberg 2021). As President Biden issued 17 executive actions to rescind restrictions imposed by the Trump administration, Causa and other Oregon groups joined a broad national coalition advocating for one of the most

elusive items on the public agenda: federal reform that would provide a pathway to citizenship for the country's estimated 10.7 million undocumented immigrants (O'Toole and Castillo 2021; Tichenor 2021b).

Conclusion

Founded as a stronghold for white conquest and domination, Oregon's early immigration policies were largely defined by nativism and racial hierarchy. They included Chinese exclusion, a preference for northern and western Europeans, and the subjugation of Mexican workers and their families. These policies yielded a population that was overwhelmingly white and European, with small numbers of Blacks, Asians, Latinos, and Indigenous residents subjected to violence, segregation, and second-class status. During the early twenty-first century, however, Oregon politics has been transformed by increasing demographic diversity and a burgeoning immigrant rights movement. As Oregon has gradually emerged as a state of immigration, with Asians and Latinos as its fastest growing populations, traditional conceptions of collective identity and belonging have been upended. Partisan polarization also has dramatically recast the character of immigration politics in the state. For generations, partisanship was a poor predictor of how the state's elected officials sought to govern noncitizens, with immigrant defenders and xenophobes scattered across both parties. Yet in the contemporary period, state Democrats have gradually become staunch defenders of immigrant inclusion, while most of their Republican counterparts have aligned with immigration restrictionists on punitive policies toward undocumented residents. Federalism also has loomed as a key factor shaping immigration politics in Oregon, with mutual dependence and rival agendas regularly fueling intergovernmental conflict. These tensions reached a crescendo between 2017 and 2021, with epic clashes between the Democratic leadership of a progressive, sanctuary state and a Republican president who made anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies core elements of his political brand.

In a sweeping new study of immigrant integration and marginalization, two prominent scholars rank Oregon among the nation's five most inclusive states on a broad set of crucial immigrant rights (Colbern and Ramakrishnan 2021). Their analysis spotlights how the state has

positioned itself on issues that have been the focus of contentious political battles in Oregon for the past two decades: tuition equity; access to driver's licenses; and sanctuary policies. Tellingly, had these experts conducted their analysis only seven years earlier, after the Measure 88 repeal of driver cards in 2014, their results would have been markedly different. It is a reminder that the quest for democratic inclusion of immigrants and their families in Oregon has followed a crooked and challenging path. Moreover, even when integration policies are at their zenith, they remain politically exposed so long as voters and elected officials in the state view immigration across a deep partisan divide. Ultimately, the political future of this issue in Oregon politics hinges upon the agency of immigrants and their children—as voters, movement activists, lobbyists, and elected officials.

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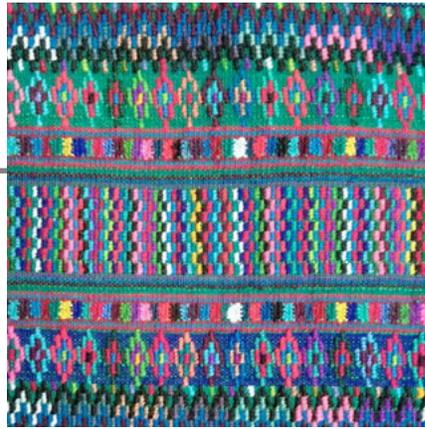
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Lynn Stephen
Department of Anthropology
University of Oregon



Chapter Five

Guatemalans in Oregon: Seeking Asylum, Surviving COVID-19

Introduction

Oregon's Latinx population has grown from 8 percent in 2000 to 13.3 percent in 2020 (Davis 2020). In Oregon's public schools, Latinx students are a rising presence, representing about 24 percent of those enrolled during the 2018-2019 academic year (Oregon Department of Education 2020:2). Latinx populations are more highly concentrated in some parts of the state than others, with six counties registering more than 20 percent: Morrow (37.3 percent), Malheur (34.4 percent); Hood River (32.1 percent), Umatilla (7.3 percent); Marion (27 percent); and Jackson (20.2 percent) (Indexmundi 2020).

While a majority of Oregon's Latinx residents have their origin in Mexico, an increasing number are from Central America, particularly from Guatemala. This increase reflects a growing diversity among Latinx immigrants by place of origin, languages spoken, race and ethnicity, and the circumstances that led them to come to Oregon. Of particular note are the increasing number of Guatemalans seeking asylum in Oregon since 2014, fleeing the damage inflicted by climate change, violence, loss of employment and other factors that produce impossible daily life circumstances and multiple vulnerabilities. Guatemalans have a significant history in Oregon, arriving in the 1980s and since then in increasing numbers to join previous generations. Their experience is both individual and integrally connected to extended families and kinship networks in their home communities as well as in the U.S.

Scholars such as Lauren Heidbrink (2020) urge us to understand migration from Guatemala to the U.S. not just as an action of victimhood, but also indicative of the development of complex collective strategies to care for and support loved ones. Human movement and settlement is always about human relations and connections.

This movement is also connected to the structural circumstances of daily life and historical and current relations of power. Analyzing growth in the movement of Central American immigrants to Oregon allows us to connect U.S. immigration policy and foreign policy in explaining why people leave their communities of origin.

In this chapter, I use the case study of more recent Guatemalan arrivals to Oregon to highlight the diversity of recent Latinx immigrants, the reasons that many are seeking asylum in the U.S., their contributions to the labor force and Oregon communities, and the challenges they have faced during COVID-19 both here and through their connections to their home communities. COVID-19 has spotlighted previously existing inequalities in Oregon in relation to immigrant populations and people of color. The case of Guatemalan immigrants, with a particular focus on Indigenous Guatemalans, follows that pattern.

A note on language

Recent debates in Latinx and Indigenous studies question the use of the words “migrant” and “immigrant” to refer to Indigenous people who move from Central America to Mexico to the U.S. Some scholars have proposed that we rethink referring to Indigenous peoples who cross national borders as “migrants” or “immigrants” because they are crossing barriers that were created as a part of the process of settler colonialism, aimed at the elimination of Indigenous peoples through various means to claim territory for white supremacist nation states (see Blackwell, Lopez and Urrieta 2017; Speed 2019; Castellanos 2020). Labelling the movement process of Indigenous peoples as trans-territorial movements or diasporas signals that Indigenous peoples in the continents of North, Central and South America known as *Abya Yala* are first peoples and their movements today continue historical movements across different Indigenous territories.

Methods

This chapter is based on research I have done in several contexts that involve collaboration with community-based organizations in Guatemala and the U.S. as well as my work as an expert witness for more than 100 cases in U.S. asylum court, primarily of Mexican and Guatemalan Indigenous asylum seekers. My research encompasses fieldwork in Guatemala in the summers of 2015–19, interviews with Mam refugees and families in the United States and Guatemala, observations of court cases and analysis of case files of femicide and gendered violence carried out against Indigenous women in Guatemala, and an analysis of all this information together in conversation with Mam interlocutors. Together with my colleague Erin Beck, a professor of political science at the University of Oregon, I have conducted four rounds of fieldwork across three different locations in Guatemala, where three of Guatemala’s thirteen specialized courts for femicide and gender violence are located: Guatemala City (the capital and largest population center); Quetzaltenango (the second-largest city and home to a significant Indigenous population); and Huehuetenango (a regional city close to the Mexican border with a majority Indigenous

population).¹ Finally, I have participated in a large-scale study of the impact of COVID-19 on Oregon farmworkers. The project began with a survey of 300 farmworkers in a variety of agricultural sectors in different parts of the state and involved a one-hour telephone survey covering the impact of the pandemic on working conditions, access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and other safety measures, housing, ability to quarantine, the financial impact of loss of work on household necessities, access to testing, healthcare and mental health care, causes of stress and anxiety at work and at home, childcare and ability to participate in school from home, ability to continue sending remittances and worries about family in communities of origin. 25 percent of the survey respondents were Indigenous, 58 percent were women and 42 percent were men, with a median age of 40. 72 percent were married or in a marriage-like relationship and most have children aged 12 or younger (Covid-19 Farmworker Study 2020:4-5). I worked with staff from eleven Oregon community-based organizations (CBOs) to design the survey, conduct the interviews, and perform a preliminary analysis of the data. The project was coordinated by Jennifer Martinez, a Ph.D. candidate in Public Affairs and Policy at Portland State University. As part of this research, I conducted nine interviews with Mam farmworkers. The survey included respondents who spoke the Indigenous languages of Kaqchikel, Mam, Mixteco Bajo, Mixteco Alto, Purépecha, and Triqui/Trique.² Here I draw from the interviews I conducted with Mam farmworkers for this study and our preliminary data analysis of the quantitative survey available at https://covid19farmworkerstudy.org/survey/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Preliminary-Data-Brief_OR_COFS_-9.22.20.pdf.

1 Beck and I have conducted over eighty-five interviews with activists, Congressional representatives, service providers, psychologists, judges, lawyers, survivors, and survivors’ family members. We have also undertaken ethnographic observations in three city centers and several rural communities and logged roughly ninety hours of ethnographic observations of oral trials and deliberation in courtrooms, often involving Indigenous survivors of gendered violence and Indigenous defendants.

2 The full list of Indigenous languages spoken by Indigenous immigrants in Oregon from Mexico and Guatemala includes: Achi, Akateko, Amuzgo, Chuj, Ixil, Huichol, Jakalteko, Kaqchikel, Mam, Maya Yucatan, Mixteco, Mixteco Alto, Mixteco Bajo, Nahuatl, Purépecha, Q’anjob’al, Q’eqchi’, Quiche (K’iche’), Tlapaneco, Tzotzil, Trique (Itunyoso and Copala), Tzeltal, Tzotzil, and Zapoteco (different variants). Each has different variants.

Patterns of Central American Movement to the U.S. and U.S. Policies

The family histories of Central American families during the past four decades inevitably include episodes of war, violence, hunger, economic difficulty, and movement. These family histories are intimately tied to U.S. foreign policy in Central America. U.S. national security doctrine—now called homeland security since 2002—centered on the discourses of the Cold War and fighting communism. It resulted in the creation of groups of people, often labeled “subversives” who were hunted, killed, and whose deaths were justified as necessary in the name of security. When these people made it into the U.S. as refugees seeking asylum, such categories still permeated their bodies and biographies in U.S. asylum proceedings in the 1980s and beyond. The integral link between U.S. foreign policy and human rights atrocities is clearly seen in the case of Guatemala.

Beginning in the 1960s, several armed guerilla groups began movements and insurgent actions against the Guatemalan state. By the late 1970s they were gaining significant ground and became the internal enemy named by the state as communists and subversives. The National Security doctrine adopted by the Guatemalan state expanded to include not only formal guerilla groups, but anyone who was suspected of supporting them. The state specifically targeted Indigenous Guatemalans as likely “subversives” who were believed by the army to be supporting guerilla armies seeking to topple the government. During the Guatemala civil war (1960-1995) over 200,000 people were killed, 45,000 people were “disappeared,” 1.5 million people displaced, and widespread sexual violence occurred (Crosby et al. 2018: 169). Statistical analyses of truth commission reports suggest that 90 percent of the victims of sexual violence during La Violencia (the violent period) were believed to be Mayan (United Nations³ 1999) with more than 100,000 women reporting they had been raped during the Guatemalan civil war (De Pablo, Zurita, and Tremlett 2011). The Report of the Commission for Historical Clarification established that 83 percent of those who died were Mayan and about 17 percent were non-Indigenous Ladinos (1999: 17).

This legacy of violence, division, and targeted killing has

3 Historical Truth Commission

persisted in many people’s lives through multiple generations. The divisions of the war have endured and connected with other kinds of power that now overlap with paramilitary groups, gangs, and local authorities. These histories have produced continuous movement, underscoring that “migration” is not a new experience for many families who have arrived recently in Oregon.

In the family histories of those I have interviewed, Mexico and the U.S. serve as part of territories of refuge. Numerous women whose asylum cases I have worked on did not have birth certificates, because they were born while their families were hiding in the mountains on the border with Mexico or they were born in Mexico during the Guatemalan civil war. Others spent their formative childhood and early adolescent years in camps in Campeche and Quintana Roo. Many have extended family members in the U.S.

As discussed by K’iche’ anthropologist Irma Alicia Velásquez Nimatuj (2019), migration, movement, and the construction of transborder territories are long-standing features of Indigenous community life. Movement and circuits have long been part of normal yearly activities; such activities include commerce, pilgrimages, kin celebrations and visits and work. Such movement and migration is important to recognize in the current moment where Indigenous migrants are constantly portrayed in the media as victims. As my own research suggests, movement not only reflects horrible conditions of violence and forced displacement, but can also involve rebuilding, collaboration, and the crafting of community (Stephen 2019, 2021).

A majority of the thousands of Guatemalan immigrants who settled in Oregon are Indigenous, reflecting the overall population of Guatemala. The richness of Indigenous languages, culture, and forms of organization and expression are important parts of the structures and relationships that hold transborder communities together. Transborder communities unite in many locations in Oregon within and between Indigenous ethnic groups for activities such as celebrating religious holidays, fundraising for projects in home communities, celebrating extended family life-cycle rituals, and playing and observing soccer, basketball, and other sports events.

By the mid 2000s, a wide range of Indigenous languages spoken by Guatemalan and Mexican immigrants could

be found in Oregon. Life history interviews I have carried out with Mam refugees and their families reveal that many women and children who have come since 2013 are linked to male family members (brothers, siblings, fathers) who began working in agriculture, forestry, or as wild mushroom and salal foliage harvesters in the late 1990s or early 2000s. These groups of primarily male migrants may also be linked to earlier generations of Guatemalans in Oregon, who were present since the 1990s (see Stephen 2017). They have served as important resources for the most recent wave of unaccompanied children and women and children that has characterized Guatemalan migration to the state after 2004.

Recent movement of Indigenous peoples from Guatemala to Oregon and other parts of the U.S. has been triggered by multiple violences, poverty, and climate change. From 2004 to 2019, a dramatic increase took place in both undocumented and legal immigration from Guatemala to the United States. Until 2011, the average annual figure for all migrants was 56,737 (Jonas and Rodríguez 2014, 60). After 2011, the numbers increased, with many refugees fleeing drug, gang, and paramilitary violence. The 2010 U.S. Census registered 1,044,209 people of Guatemalan origin (U.S. Census Bureau 2011). By 2019 this number was up to 1,683,093 (Statistica Research Department 2021) with 16,727 located in Oregon (U.S. Census Bureau 2019).

While making the journey from Guatemala to Oregon has always been a high-risk proposition, the danger increased significantly beginning in the 2000s. For Central Americans passing into Mexico over its southern border, the journey is perilous. While no official statistics exist, unofficial estimates claim that between 70,000 and 150,000 Central Americans have disappeared in recent years while trying to cross Mexico—numbers similar to those who died in the Salvadoran and Guatemalan civil wars (Telesur 2014). At least 77,178 people are officially registered as disappeared in Mexico from 2006 until late 2020, and that figure doesn't include 27,000 unidentified bodies.⁴ In January of 2021, 19 bodies were found shot and burned inside of three vehicles in Santa Anita Carmago in the state of Tamaulipas, Mexico, close to the U.S.-Mexico

4 Tribune News Service, "México cifra 77,178 desaparecidos desde 2006," and Wattenbarger, "For Mexico's President." <https://www.chicagotribune.com/espanol/sns-es-mexico-cifra-77000-desaparecidos-20201007-bxyf2qeisnbz5hcrj2p73gmbeu-story.html>

border. Some of the bodies were identified as belonging to Guatemalan migrants. Twelve state police were arrested in connection with the killings (Peñas 2021). The tragic event occurred in the same state where 72 Central American migrants were massacred in 2010, allegedly by an organized crime group.

According to U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), FY 2018 saw a significant increase in the numbers of family units crossing into the U.S. with 84,405 family units "apprehended," 42,757 of those from Guatemala (U.S. CBP 2018). Between October 2018 and May 2019—only nine months—149,081 family units and 24,638 unaccompanied minors from Guatemala were "apprehended" by CBP (U.S. Customs and Border Protection 2019).

For much of 2019 these numbers declined significantly due to Mexico's increased deportations of Guatemalans and the U.S. government's closure of the border with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. By late 2019, however, a large number of Guatemalans had entered the U.S. to seek asylum. By February of 2021, Central American families were again headed for the U.S.-Mexico border in hopes of receiving asylum under new executive orders that the Biden administration released potentially increasing access to asylum. Open air camps on the border were expanding with more asylum seekers entering the U.S. (Jordan and Rivlan Nader 2021).

In Oregon, the period from 2013 to 2019 was marked by an increase in undocumented Mam women and others from transborder Guatemalan communities. Many women also came with some of their children. Almost all were seeking to escape multiple forms of violence and reunite with family members in rooted transborder communities, according to more than forty interviews I have conducted with Mam women, children, and adolescent refugees in the Northwest who fled violence after 2014.

By integrating themselves into Mam immigrant communities in Oregon and reconnecting with kin, compadres, and making new ties, the social groups and communities have been re-assembled with redefinitions of territory through networks, multiple sites of transborder communities in the U.S. and a reworking of the physical bodies of indigenous women immigrants in the U.S. aided by the building of community and agency.

Guatemalans Seeking Asylum in Oregon

The right to asylum is guaranteed in Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution” (United Nations 1948). Two other UN conventions also protect this right: the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees. These conventions define a refugee as a person who is outside their own country’s territory (or place of habitual residence if stateless) owing to fear of persecution on protected grounds (United Nations 2021). The recent increase in arrivals of Central Americans has been accompanied by a major surge in asylum requests. Many Guatemalans who have come to Oregon and to other states seek asylum. Asylum can be granted in the United States if an applicant can demonstrate they have been persecuted in the past or have a well-founded fear of persecution on five grounds: membership in a particular social group, religion, race, nationality, or political opinion. However, my work as an expert witness for asylum seekers from Mexico and Central America suggests that asylum pertains not just to individuals fleeing persecution but also to networks of people who are connected in daily life. Violence, poverty, climate change, and unemployment are experienced collectively in communities. Moreover, people flee internally before they leave their countries. While some come alone, many come with families.

The number of asylum seekers in Oregon currently is quite significant and reflects the increase in Guatemalan refugees and family members arriving in the state during the past five years. As of March 1, 2021 there were 285,198 pending Guatemalan immigration cases in all of the U.S, with 3,216 of these cases based in Oregon (TRAC Immigration 2021). The average number of days that elapsed before these cases could be heard in Oregon immigration courts was 781 days, or more than two years. Each of these pending asylum cases can represent more than one person as usually there are family members attached to them.

Guatemalan Indigenous Agricultural Workers

If recent Guatemalan arrivants are undocumented or are waiting for their asylum hearing, they do not have legal

permission to work until their asylum application or hearing has been pending for at least 365 days. This means that the most recent arrivals are without a source of support and usually depend on family members. Most of the people I have interviewed and worked with on their asylum cases as an expert witness live with relatives and depend on them for many different kinds of support when they first arrive. Once asylum seekers have been here for a while, they find ways to work—often in seasonal agricultural work and harvesting a variety of plants from Oregon forests. Others may find work in food processing.

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in healthcare and grocery store and delivery employees being labeled as heroes and essential workers. For Oregon’s approximately 174,000 migrant and seasonal agricultural workers and their family members, the label of “essential worker” came more slowly (Oregon Health Authority 2018). While most continued to work as much as they could after the pandemic started to put food on their own and everyone else’s tables, many did not have equal access to medical care and other forms of support offered during the pandemic such as rent relief, quarantine supplemental income, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and unemployment (Bauer, 2020). The Pew Research Center found in 2014 that the occupation in Oregon with the highest rate of undocumented immigrants in the labor force was farming at 37 percent (Pew Research Center 2016). This number is likely higher, but whatever the precise figure is, it meant that undocumented farmworkers and their families were ineligible for many forms of COVID relief. And even if they are eligible for programs such as the \$20 million dollar Oregon Worker Relief Fund (see Nixon 2020) to help immigrant Oregonians who didn’t qualify for unemployment, the Oregon COFS survey found that about 48 percent of 300 respondents knew nothing about the fund (COFS 2020:13). When Indigenous respondents in the survey were asked about their knowledge of the Oregon Worker Relief Fund, 60 percent indicated they were unaware of the fund (COFS 2020:13). Similarly, when asked about knowledge of sick and family leave, 53 percent indicated a lack of awareness, and among Indigenous respondents, this figure was even higher at 58 percent (COFS 2020:14).

For recent Mam and other Indigenous Guatemalan farmworkers who are largely undocumented or might have pending asylum claims, finding and maintaining work in

Oregon presented unique challenges, particularly during 2020. During the summer of 2020, I interviewed nine agricultural worker families; eight of these interviews were conducted as part of the COFS survey. I knew some of these families previously through working on their asylum cases. These workers were part of clusters of Indigenous Guatemalans in the Woodburn/Gervais area in Marion County, Newport and nearby communities in Lincoln County on the coast, and families in and around Eugene, Cottage Grove, and Springfield in Lane County.

Portraits of Mam Farmworker Families⁵

My previous interviews with Mam asylees and their families in Oregon and back in Huehuetenango suggested some clear patterns to migration and labor.



Figure 1. Map of Guatemala, the Department of Huehuetenango is on the western border with Mexico.

Source: <https://geology.com/world/guatemala-satellite-image.shtml/> (open source).

⁵ All names have been changed here as well as some life details to protect the identity of participants.

A majority of the men, women, and adolescents I have interviewed over the past five years have worked in agriculture for their entire lives, beginning at ages four or five. Many began as wage laborers in coffee or other export crops in Guatemala. For example, Juana and her brother José grew up in a small hamlet several hours outside of San Sebastián, Huehuetenango. José now lives in Woodburn, Oregon and participated in the COFS survey. The hamlet Juana and José and grew up in was about a three and a half hour walk from the main town center. Both worked as child wage laborers in the regional coffee export sector. Beginning when José was 10 and Juana was 12, they were dropped off at a coffee plantation in the community known as La Libertad.

As Juana recalled in a 2019 interview in Huehuetenango:

“We lived in these big wooden structures called “galeras” with a corrugated aluminum roof. A bunch of families all sleep in the same space on wooden platforms. There is no privacy. You have to cook for yourself there. On the plantation they gave us corn to eat, but we had to prepare it and cook it. ...It was very difficult for us there as children. My Dad would leave us there at the plantation and pick us up when the work was done. We were alone. I had to pick coffee everyday with José and then I cooked for us. I worked there until I was 21 years old and met my husband and got married.”

As an older girl (12), Juana was in charge of taking care of her brother who worked full time on the plantation and was paid a lower wage than adults.

Today, José harvests berries, hazelnuts and other crops in Oregon along with his wife. They have two children who stay with a neighbor while both work harvesting blueberries and other berries in the summer, hazelnuts in the fall, and whatever work they can find between January and June. During the COVID-19 pandemic, they lost months of work and their children were at home.

José arrived in Oregon in 2013 from his community in Huehuetenango. After he was here for several years, he paid for his wife María and his youngest daughter to be brought to the U.S. after they received death threats on the phone and through notes where they were living. The death threats were connected to attempts to extort money from them. José's sister Juana accompanied them to the border with Mexico in February of 2015. From there, José's wife María and her infant daughter went through Mexico to Oregon where they applied for asylum. They were granted asylum in 2016, and I was an expert witness in their case. Their oldest child, who had remained in Guatemala, arrived in Oregon in 2017 after she received asylum and was able to join her parents and sister.

Both José and María had been working a plot of land before they arrived in the U.S. José also did construction work and María worked briefly in a restaurant where José ate. For most of their lives, however, they worked planting corn and vegetables and as agricultural laborers. When they moved to Oregon, they sought to continue that work, joining other Mam families, particularly those who are undocumented, in harvesting a variety of products in Oregon forests including salal, pinecones, and wild mushrooms.

Magdalena and her family reflect a similar trajectory.⁶ She was born in the middle of Guatemala's civil war in the Department of Huehuetenango and witnessed the killing of her father. Later that same day the army burned down their home and they were driven into the forest. They eventually went to live with relatives, and Magdalena worked in the fields of these family members who took her in. From the age of five she worked planting, weeding, and tending to potatoes and sometimes corn. At the age of 16 she met her future husband Mario while visiting another community. They subsequently married and had five children.

Magdalena and Mario worked the land that Magdalena eventually inherited, planting potatoes and some other crops. Magdalena began to receive threats on her life at the same time her husband was beaten up and threatened

repeatedly. After several serious assaults he left Guatemala and came to the U.S. in about 2013. Magdalena received death threats from the people who had beaten up her husband. Several years later, two of Magdalena's children were threatened with harm by local gangs if they didn't join. The threats against her continued as well. Fearing for her family's safety, she came to the U.S. in 2017 with her five children and joined Mario. They now live and work in different locations throughout Oregon, depending on the season. The family has worked in seafood processing, berry harvesting, salal harvesting, pinecone harvesting, mushroom harvesting, and most recently pruning and planting berry bushes. Magdalena now has a pending asylum application based on her declaration of persecution and receipt of death threats.

Rodolfo grew up in a small Mam-speaking hamlet high up in western Guatemala in the state of Huehuetenango. He married Teresa at age 20 and they have two sons and a daughter. Rodolfo did not have his own land and worked as a day laborer in other people's fields, raising corn, and vegetables such as broccoli, cauliflower, and potatoes. His wife earned some income through producing textiles, which she wove and occasionally sold to a store in a small city where tourists or others would purchase them. When local gangs threatened their sons and work became scarce, they all came to the U.S. in 2019 as a part of a large wave of Guatemalans. They had relatives in Oregon whom they sought to join. Because they declared themselves to be asylum seekers at the border, they were held briefly in detention, given ankle bracelet monitors and then allowed to join the relatives who paid for their bus tickets from the border.

Rodolfo and his family moved into a crowded house that had one family per room and began to work wherever they could, usually harvesting salal and mushrooms and selling them to brokers. The conditions of their release required them to submit to regular check-ins at an ICE field office. During one of these visits that Teresa attended with her two sons, she was accused by ICE agents of tampering with her ankle bracelet. She and her two sons were deported without a hearing, leaving Rodolfo alone with the youngest child. Since this traumatic event, he has struggled greatly to work, feed and house his young son, and support him in school.

⁶ The following two paragraphs on Josefina are from Lynn Stephen, "Let Families and Communities Seek Asylum Together," Public Books, July 9, 2021, <https://www.publicbooks.org/let-families-and-communities-seek-asylum-together/>

Josefina grew up in a small hamlet west of the city of Huehuetenango.⁷ Her parents had a small plot of land and she worked there as a child, also harvesting coffee for part of the year. She speaks Mam and Spanish, which she learned while attending elementary school. Josefina had a child at age 21 and the father decided not to support her and her daughter, so she is a single mother. After several attempts by organized crime to extort her because it was known that she had siblings and cousins in the U.S. and then threats to kill her if she did not pay, Josefina made the difficult decision to leave for the U.S. along with her infant daughter in late 2018, coming to Oregon where she had family. Her passage to the U.S. cost about \$10,000. Because she could carry her infant daughter, she was not charged for her passage.

When she first arrived, Josefina lived with a sibling for a while and then moved into an apartment with two other families, occupying the living room with her daughter. She sought work in whatever was available in order to send regular payments covering her \$10,000 debt. She has worked harvesting grapes, blueberries, beets, onions, and has also worked at nurseries. While trying to meet her debt obligation, Josefina paid a neighbor \$20 per day to watch her toddler daughter. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she lost two months of work and had to take out loans from people she knew locally.

These four family portraits provide a more in-depth sense of the backgrounds, living, working, and social conditions that recently arrived Guatemalan Indigenous people have experienced in Oregon. They provide context for interpreting the results of the COFS survey in relation to the larger Indigenous farmworker population surveyed.

Conditions for Indigenous Farmworkers under COVID-19: Accentuating Already Existing Inequalities

Seasonal agricultural work has long been coupled with uneven and difficult labor conditions and fluctuating piece-rates. Indigenous farmworkers from Guatemala and Mexico, particularly those who are recent arrivals, often

⁷ The next two paragraphs draw on Lynn Stephen, “Let Families and Communities Seek Asylum Together,” Public Books, July 9, 2021, <https://www.publicbooks.org/let-families-and-communities-seek-asylum-together/>



Oregon forest plant, salal, harvested for the floral industry.

move between harvesting salal in Oregon and Washington’s coastal forests and berry and grape harvests. Salal is a dark, leafy evergreen plant with dark berries that is indigenous to the coastal regions of the Pacific Northwest and is exported throughout the world as part of floral arrangements. Salal berries were and still are harvested by Oregon’s Indigenous coastal peoples. Mam workers often harvest salal in family groups. Salal is packaged in bunches and harvesters are paid by the bundle/bunch. Salal harvesting is an economic strategy that many families rely on when there is no other work available. Labor contractors also put together salal harvesting crews, often recruiting people through family and community networks.

At different points in time, because many salal harvesters are recent arrivals who are undocumented, they have been targeted by ICE, particularly in the state of Washington (James 2000). Little formal research has been conducted on salal harvesters in the state of Oregon. A 2012 *Mexican Law Review* article focuses on about 1,200 Mam workers and families from Todos Santos Cuchumatán, Huehuetenango who have settled in Shelton, Bremerton, Belfair and Forks on the Olympic Peninsula and earn their living harvesting salal and other forest products (Geyman et. al. 2012). The article also discusses 5,000 Mixtec workers from Oaxaca and Guerrero who live and

work in Washington state. The article documents many of the same challenges faced by Mam and other Indigenous workers in Oregon during the 2020 COVID-19 outbreak. These include linguistic barriers in many arenas, lack of access to information about services, labor rights, and other resources, lack of access to healthcare, lack of adequate housing, and limited work opportunities.

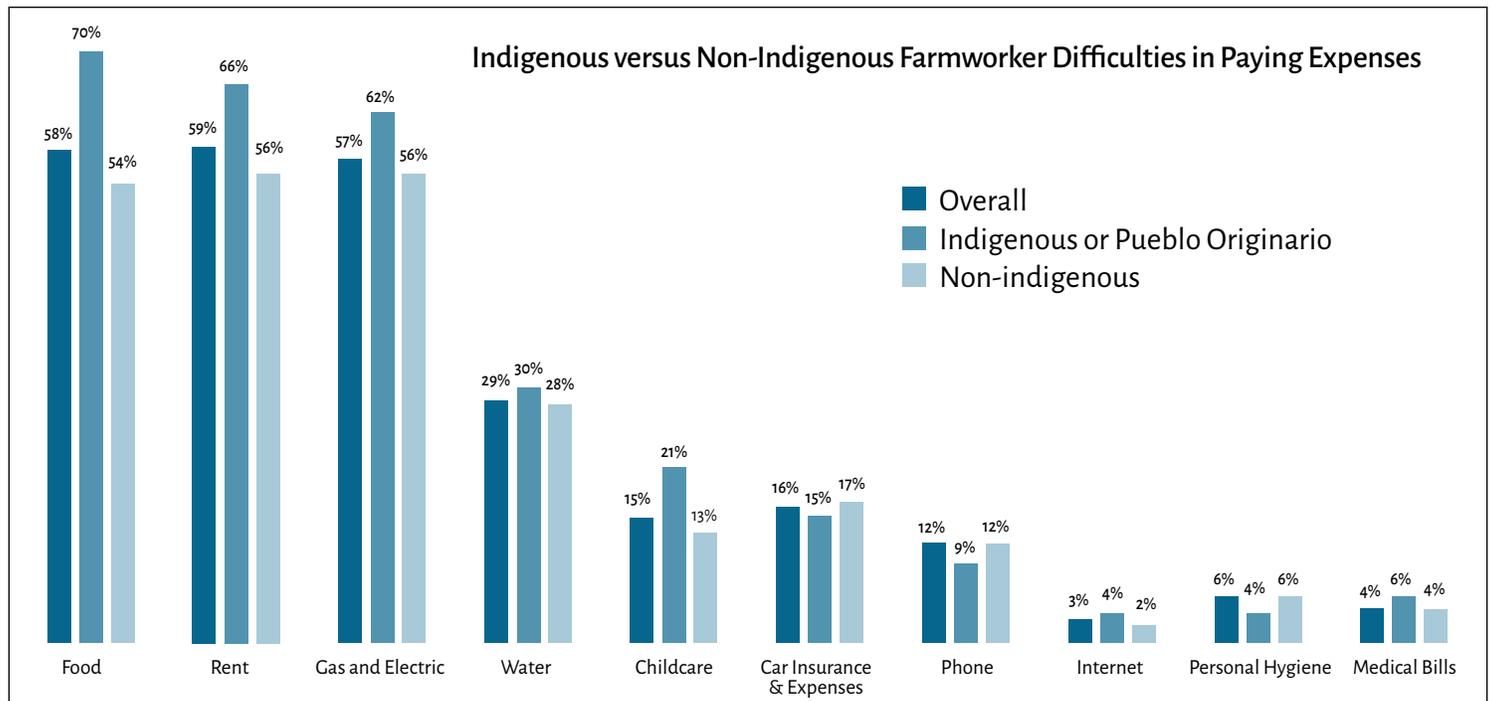
The article describes a Mam migration pattern similar to what I have observed in Oregon. In the early 2000s, men arrived first, leaving their wives and children in Todos Santos. By 2010 or so, more women arrived with children. While Geyman et. al (2012: 48) state that all Mam workers who harvest salal and other plants are male, that is not the case in Oregon, with women and sometimes children joining in the harvesting. In Washington workers were employed by floral greenery companies called bush sheds that package and sell salal and other products worldwide. They often work long days in the rain. Picking bunches of 1.5 pounds each, they can harvest up to 300 pounds per day (Hoare 2007).

Washington reports on salal wages stated they could run from up to \$500 per week for workers laboring seven days a week (Hoare 2007) to less than the Washington minimum wage of \$8.55 per hour in 2012 (Geyman et.

al. 2012). In Oregon during the summer of 2020, workers reported that they earned between \$2.25 per bunch until March but then the price went down to \$1.75 per bunch. Men and women reported being able to pick between 50-60 bundles per day, with earnings between \$87.50-\$100/day, depending on the price and how many bunches they could pick and haul back to be cleaned and packed. They worked very long hours to achieve these earnings.

Mam workers also engage in harvesting pine cones and mushrooms from the forest. Pine cone harvesting is done in national forests. Families often work in groups to harvest cones from the forest floor and then sell them to wholesalers who resell them to seasonal holiday businesses for decorations such as cinnamon scented pinecones for wreaths, trees, and floral arrangements. During the summer of 2020, pine cone harvesters earned approximately \$5.00 per bag; each bag contained close to 100 cones. They were able to earn from \$60.00 to \$75.00 per day if they were able to gather 12-15 bags. Workers have to provide their own shelter and food while harvesting pine cones.

Strawberry, blueberry and marionberry harvesting has long been a sector where Indigenous Mexican and Guatemalan people have labored in Oregon. When Oregon's farmworker union *Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del*



This chart is from page 10 of the Preliminary Data Brief: Oregon Fires Exacerbate COVID-19 Impact on Farmworkers' Health, Housing, and Livelihoods, Oregon COVID 19 Farmworker Study, September 21, 2020, available at: http://covid19farmworkerstudy.org/survey/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Preliminary-Data-Brief_OR_COFS_-9.22.20.pdf

Noroeste (PCUN) was founded in 1985, an increasing number of Mixtec, Zapotec, Triqui and other Indigenous members of the organization became part of the membership (see Stephen 2007). Those that received residency under the Special Agricultural Worker's program (SAW), a part of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986, eventually went on to work in other sectors outside of farm labor. Their undocumented relatives often became those who worked in seasonal berry harvesting. By the 2010s, Indigenous Guatemalans were also strongly represented in the berry harvesting sectors. By the summer of 2020, Guatemalan workers were reporting that on some farms up to half of the berry harvesters were Mam speakers. Blueberries are a valuable Oregon commodity, worth more than \$180 million in 2018 (Plaven 2020). Indigenous workers are also prominent in strawberry harvesting. By law, workers in Oregon are required to be paid the state's minimum wage if they don't reach that pay level through a piece rate. In 2016 strawberry workers were paid from \$.60 to \$.80 per hour, with the slowest picking between 20 and 25 pounds per hour, and earning from \$12 - \$15 per hour, according to one grower (Slovic 2016). Because berry harvesting is seasonal, workers try to maximize their earnings by working as many hours as possible.

The COVID-19 Pandemic of 2020-21 and Its Impact on Indigenous Farmworkers

On March 23, 2020, Oregon Governor Kate Brown issued a state-wide stay at home order, an action that quickly affected the lives of farmworkers. Workplaces and schools closed, while workers and their families were told to stay at home. The most immediate impact for farmworkers was a loss of income. Preliminary analysis of 214 surveys collected as part of the COFS indicated that 68 percent of farmworkers had lost income due to the pandemic, with a majority losing weeks and even months of work (COFS 2020: 8-9). The experience of Mario and Magdalena, profiled above, illustrates this loss and its cascading impact. Mario and Magdalena were working harvesting *salal* while their older son was working in a seafood packing plant. According to Mario, "it was really hard. We were at home for two months with no work. My wife and also my oldest son. All of the companies closed. There was nowhere for us to sell the *salal*."

Like many other Mam workers, Magdalena and Mario had trouble paying their rent and utilities and had to borrow money. They received some help from food banks, but were mostly on their own. The Oregon COFS study preliminary data analysis found that "among farmworkers that identified as Indigenous to Mexico and Guatemala, 70 percent found it difficult to pay for food during the pandemic, with 66 percent, 62 percent and 21 percent reporting difficulty paying rent, gas and electric, and childcare respectively" (COFS 2020: 10). These difficulties exceed those faced by the non-Indigenous farmworker population surveyed as illustrated in the graph below.

Difficulties Paying Expenses: Indigenous Versus Non-Indigenous Farmworkers

Families like those of Mario and Magdalena, José and María, Josefina and her daughter, and Rodolfo and his son are all connected to their communities of origin. They use Whatsapp to communicate regularly with parents, siblings, nieces, nephews, and others in their extended families. Many Indigenous farmworkers are also supporting members of their extended families in Guatemala and Mexico with regular remittances and now have less money to send to their relatives. For many, their income loss created additional worry because they knew that their elderly parents or others depended on what they sent to eat and pay for expenses. As the pandemic spread in Guatemala, local markets and buses and vans in regional transportation systems shut down, forcing people to remain in place and not be able to work.

At the time that the COFS survey was administered in July, August, and September of 2020, 40 percent of respondents reported that they could no longer send remittances to family in Guatemala. 34 percent reported sending less. This was a source of real worry for José. At the time of the pandemic shutdown, he was sending money regularly to his parents. But in March of 2020, he lost work for two months. "I didn't have anything to send to them for more than two months because I was harvesting *salal*, going to the mountains. They closed the company I sold to. It was closed a long time and I had no work. When I finally started to work again in May, I could start to send some money to my parents, but not as much as before."

José was especially worried about his parents' health and associated his inability to send support with putting them in danger. "I am really worried about my parents' health," he reported. "They are old, and they are sick. I don't want them to need anything. I was sending them money so that they could stay home. I didn't want them to leave to try to earn money so they can stay home....I was worried about COVID. I have not heard yet about a case in the little hamlet where they live, but in the main town there are lots of cases. I have a sister who is a nurse and she and others she works with got sick with COVID." Rodolfo, whose wife and sons were deported, worries particularly about them. He stated:

"I am really worried about maintaining my family there in Guatemala, my wife and my sons. When they were deported they arrived there without any money. There is no transport there. Sometimes it's so bad that I have to borrow money just to send to my wife and my sons."

Like many Mam workers, José became worried not only about getting work and his inability to send support to his parents but also coping with his daughters being at home and his and Maria's responsibility for helping them with school. "They were studying in the house. It became difficult when they had to go to school in the house and were using computers. When the whole thing started it went fine, but then they just didn't want to pay attention...They said it wasn't the same as being in school. They didn't do the schoolwork. It is worrying....We were helping them, but they got bored...they started to cry....we felt really pressured. They told us "you are not teachers." It was really hard." Jose went on to explain:

"We lost two months of work. We didn't start to work until half-way through May. Because of the disease, the growers didn't give us work. My wife and I lost a lot of work...we were in crises for some days.... it's like what happens in the wintertime, in November, December, January, there is no work. It was even worse because we hadn't worked those months and then in March and April we were without work, too. It was really hard."

José reported ongoing headaches "because of stress. Me, my wife, and my daughters all felt really stressed out." His stress continued into the fall of 2019 with loss of work due to wildfire smoke.

Families that were used to being out working and going to school during the day were suddenly all together, all day long. For families in crowded living quarters that they shared with others, they may have been confined to one or two rooms. Everyone found themselves at home with children who had to adjust to school on-line. Often families didn't have the internet in their home and children were attempting to access their classes through shared cell phones. School was often in English or in Spanish and Indigenous language speakers had difficulty even understanding what their children were supposed to do. Rodolfo, who was living with his son in a rented room in an apartment they shared with another family, struggled to help his son in school. "He got really bored at home. He did a little of school at home. They brought us a tablet for him to work on, but we don't have the internet. Finally, they just sent pieces of paper and he worked on those." Once Rodolfo returned to work harvesting salal and berries, he had to pay someone \$10-\$20 per day to watch his son who was still supposed to be studying at home. He did his best, but with medical expenses related to his own health, childcare, and the need to send money to Guatemala, he cited feeling depression, headaches, and fright as symptoms of his stress. "I feel really sad. I have headaches and feel sad when I don't know how I will pay my expenses." Rodolfo also worked harvesting salal in toxic smoke generated during the Oregon wildfires in September of 2020. "It's hard to breathe, but where am I going to go? I have to earn money."

Josefina lost two months of work from March to May of 2020 due to the pandemic. She struggled to be able to take care of her daughter and put food on the table. She had to borrow money from Guatemalan friends who fortunately did not charge her interest. She still owed a lot of money related to her journey to the U.S.

"When the COVID sickness started, I still owed for my passage to my coyote. I couldn't pay it. I still had debt during the pandemic. ...After I started to work again later in May, I was able to start paying again. "

Josefina also reported feeling sadness and desperation at not being able to work.

The experiences and feelings of Juan, Rodolfo, and Josefina were representative of many in the COFS Oregon survey. The combination of income loss, inability to pay bills and send remittances, struggles to educate children at home, and worry about relatives in home communities produced stress in a significant number of people surveyed, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. 27 percent reported feelings of fear and anxiety, 27 percent felt depressed, 19 percent reported migraines and headaches, 16 percent reported feeling tired, 10 percent felt “stress,” and others reported anger, frustration, anxiety and sadness. Of the 212 people surveyed and included in the initial data analysis, 91 percent reported that they had no access to formal mental health support (See COFS 2020). Despite a lack of access to mental health support, all of the Mam people I interviewed for the survey had creative responses for coping with stress: praying together; walking outside; listening to music and singing together; reading; hiking in nature; watching TV; using traditional medicinal cures; and other activities. All were conscious of the need to work with their family members to create possibilities of connection and support.

In fact, José reported to me in a later conversation that he had worked with other people to create a mutual support association among 100 members of the Mam community in and around the Salem and Woodburn areas. They helped to pay the hospital bill of a woman who got sick, made small loans to people, and reached out to help others who were not in their organized group, but who needed help. Thus, in the middle of the pandemic, even while struggling on multiple levels, Indigenous farmworkers and community members were supporting one another. This became even more important because, as the COFS revealed as discussed above, a significant number of Indigenous farmworkers did not have information about benefits and rights that they could access.

There are organizations that serve Indigenous farmworkers in the state of Oregon, and many of these were partners in the COFS project. Oregon Law Center and Legal Aid Services provide a wide range of educational and legal services, with some programs that serve Indigenous farmworkers in their own languages. Oregon Human Development Corporation, CASA of Oregon, and the Farm-

worker Housing Development Corporation offer housing and outreach programs. PCUN has a significant number of Indigenous members and two Mixtec staff members who work with Indigenous programming. There are few organizations, however, that have staff and programs specifically targeting recent Guatemalan Indigenous workers in Oregon. It is the hope of the partner organizations in the COFS project that our research and advocacy will result in more resources for Indigenous farmworkers.

Conclusions

Oregon’s Latinx Immigrant population continues to increase in its diversity and this trend is likely to continue. The connections between U.S. foreign policy, immigration policy, and the conditions they create and reinforce in Central America continue to impact the lives of immigrant Oregonians and all Oregonians. Moreover, U.S. inspired policy in Central America directed at rooting out, punishing, and eliminating “subversives” in the name of national security is now being recycled in the U.S. in white supremacist, anti-immigrant rhetoric that has surfaced in public political discourse throughout the Pacific Northwest. Central Americans and other Latinx immigrants have established histories in Oregon and make major contributions to the state. The COVID-19 pandemic has put already existing inequalities into sharp focus, revealing the ongoing challenges faced by Oregon’s Latinx immigrant population, particularly those who are essential workers.

Latinx immigrant farmworkers put food on our tables. A significant percentage of farmworkers are Indigenous and come from millennial generations of ancestors who were the first to domesticate basic parts of our basic diet such as corn. Many come to the U.S. with deep knowledge of a wide range of food producing systems, bringing that experience and knowledge with them. Like José, his family and others I profiled, Indigenous immigrant farmworkers bring many contributions to our state that benefit us all. It’s time that our state and federal labor policies, health policies, and other arenas of services acknowledge not only their presence and challenges but also what they can offer. Deeply networked both here and back to their home communities, Indigenous immigrants can offer us all deep lessons in how to construct caring and connected communities across many borders.

I will end by sharing four of the policy recommendations we have made through our research in the COFS project. Please work with us to make these a reality in Oregon.

1. Provide compensation for farmworkers who were forced to take time off work and/or relied on informal networks for caretaking or childcare responsibilities due to the closure of childcare facilities and the transition to virtual education since the start of COVID-19.
2. Mandate employers provide training, when not already required, in languages farmworkers speak and provide targeted plans to improve language accessibility of information, rules, and guidance published by government agencies by funding local organizers and navigators who can reach and inform farmworkers who speak Indigenous languages.
3. Provide frequent and extensive access to COVID-19 testing with convenient access to lab results, vaccinations, and traditional methods of mental health support administered through trusted community clinics.
4. Ease barriers for exercising legal rights by connecting farmworkers to legal navigators in their first languages that can provide advice on workplace rights, tenant rights, concerns over public charge, and immigrant rights.

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Lola Loustaunau and Robert Bussel
Labor Education and Research Center
University of Oregon



Chapter Six

Immigrants in the Oregon Workplace: Essential Work, COVID-19, and Strategies for Integration

The momentous decision to leave one's country of origin reflects multiple and often overlapping considerations: reuniting with family members who have migrated to other places; escaping domestic violence, personal threats, or political persecution; seeking greater freedom to express religious or political beliefs; accessing expanded educational opportunities; and more recently, fleeing the devastating effects of climate change. In addition to these factors, many migrants cite the lack of economic opportunity in their home countries and the need to obtain work that can improve their life prospects and allow them to send financial support to the families they have left behind. Indeed, for many immigrants the workplace represents a principal arena where their quest for social, civic, and economic integration unfolds, replete with challenges, successes, and ongoing adaptation to the demands of their new environment. In this chapter we will explore the role of immigrants in Oregon's economy by focusing on their contributions as essential workers, an identity magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic and its far-reaching impact on individuals, families, and communities. Although we recognize that immigrants work in diverse settings and in many different occupations, we believe that a focus on immigrants as essential workers will yield valuable insights into their vital role in Oregon's economy, the adaptive strategies they have developed, and the role that other institutions have played in helping support their aspirations.

The important contributions that immigrants make as workers is a familiar story yet one that often remains hidden from public view. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed this perception, making the term "essential worker" a new part of our cultural vocabulary and highlighting the critical social and economic contributions made by immigrant workers, often at great personal risk. For immigrants employed in industries such as agriculture, food processing, health and childcare, construction, transportation, restaurants, and cleaning and building maintenance, being acknowledged as "essential" represents an ironic achievement. As PCUN (Pinos y Campesinos del Noroeste) executive director Reyna Lopez observed in referring to the agricultural workers her organization represents, "finally people understand what they should have known before, that workers who put food on our tables have always been essential, not only before but also during and after the pandemic is over." This long overdue recognition underscores an important realization that has emerged from the pandemic: the need not only to recognize but also directly support immigrant workers whose essential labor makes possible the social and economic well-being of all Oregonians.

After providing a brief statistical portrait of the role of immigrants in Oregon's economy, we will review insights gained from over three dozen interviews conducted with immigrants about their experiences as

essential workers in Oregon.¹ Next, drawing on observations obtained from interviews with advocates and practitioners and using frameworks derived from relevant secondary literature, we will examine some specific challenges faced by immigrant workers that have been accentuated during the pandemic, especially those related to occupational health and safety and workplace rights and protections. We will also discuss how workers and advocates have been able to organize and fight for better working conditions. Finally, defining immigrant integration in the workplace as a “highly local, two-way process engaging all key actors in a community,” we will consider some institutions and initiatives that have supported this process, most notably joint labor-management apprenticeship programs and career training offered by Oregon’s community colleges (Creticos, et.al., 2006). We conclude by offering some recommendations aimed at providing greater support for immigrant integration in the workplace and improving the status of immigrants in their roles as essential workers.

Immigrant Workers in Oregon: A Statistical Portrait

According to a recent Oregon Employment Department study, 13.2 percent of Oregon’s civilian work force is foreign-born, with strong representation from Central and Latin American (43 percent), Asian (32 percent), and European (15 percent) countries of origin (Fields, 2020). Immigrant workers are often employed in essential industries, defined by the U. S. Department of Homeland Security as “critical infrastructure operations” such as food production and distribution, health care and childcare, construction, manufacturing, transportation, and cleaning and maintenance. The Center for Migration Studies estimates that 14.6 percent of all essential workers in Oregon are foreign-born (Kerwin, et. al. 2020). Figure 1 identifies some of the essential industries where immigrants are employed, a somewhat larger number than their overall representation in Oregon’s labor force. As we have learned during COVID-19, work in these essential industries helps to sustain the health and welfare of Oregonians, along with the vital services that immigrants provide in other critical occupations such as health care, childcare, retail, and food processing.

¹ In some cases we use pseudonyms for interviewees who did not wish to be named.

Figure 1

| Industry | Immigrant Share (%) (of all industry workers) |
|--|--|
| Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting | 28 |
| Manufacturing | 21 |
| Administrative & Support; Waste Management; and Remediation Services | 18 |
| Accommodation and Food Services | 16 |
| Construction | 14 |

Source: Analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2018 American Community Survey 1-year PUMS data by the American Immigration Council.

The strong labor force participation of immigrants is also reflected in their monetary contributions to Oregon’s economy. In 2018, immigrant led households paid an estimated 2.8 billion in federal taxes and nearly 1.3 billion in state and local taxes along with generating 11 billion dollars in after tax income consumer spending (American Immigration Council, 2020). As workers supplying essential labor, as taxpayers supporting social infrastructure, and as consumers purchasing goods and services, immigrants play an integral role in Oregon’s workplaces and its economy, a role that has been made even more visible under pandemic conditions.

Migrant Trajectories: Addressing Patterns and Heterogeneity

Understanding the complex and varied experiences of (im)migrant workers in Oregon requires acknowledging that there is no universal or unilinear migrant story. This recognition allows us to tell a more nuanced story highlighting the heterogeneity of migration (De Genova 2002). Also, using an intersectional framework can help us situate migrant workers’ trajectories by acknowledging differences in gender, race, education, and migratory status along with other forms of identity and experience. The complex job trajectories and life narratives of migrant workers in Oregon demonstrate the shortcomings of understanding the migrant experience in a monolithic, essentialized way that fails to capture the ongoing move-

ment of peoples across national and state borders or recognize the enduring transnational bonds that represent a vital feature of the migrant experience.

Regardless of what forces led them to begin their migratory journey, most interviewees revealed that they lacked an accurate understanding of the working and living conditions they would face once they got to the United States. Marta, a sanitation worker who has been in Oregon for over thirty years, recalled:

“Before coming here I saw people in the U.S. had nice cars, nice clothes and I thought well that looks like an amazing place, and I didn’t realize how hard one has to work here to get any of that...I thought I would be able to make money easily and go back to Mexico...but living here is so expensive, one lives paycheck to paycheck. My generation, we are in the middle, we have responsibilities with those we left in Mexico, and responsibilities with those we have here now, and that can be a heavy burden.”

These sentiments are in line with research that has shown the disparity between the ‘globalized’ American Dream exported through television and the movie industry (Mahler 1995; Stoll 2009) and the socioeconomic realities many migrant workers face. Nevertheless, this gap between expectation and reality does not mean migrants cannot access some elements of this promised world, with many workers emphasizing their enhanced economic options and a greater ability to help their families abroad, even if these opportunities come at a higher cost than they had imagined. Despite the challenges, workers’ stories combine a continuing investment in what one interviewee described as “looking for the American Dream” with a clear awareness of the difference between what they thought they would find and the circumstances they actually discovered. Our conversations with workers affirmed that migratory status and time spent in the U.S. represent key dimensions that help explain variation among migrants regarding economic stability and access to better working conditions (Durand et al. 2016; Massey and Gentsch 2014).



Photo: Bob Nichols, USDA

The Challenges of Being a Migrant Worker

While recent events have highlighted migrant workers' essential roles in both the Oregon and U.S. economies, research on migrant workers shows the complexity of their incorporation into the American workforce. Their status as foreigners, lack of familiarity with laws and labor regulations, and limited English proficiency significantly shapes their experiences in the workplace and their access to social, civil, and political rights (Aysa-Lastra and Rodríguez 2015; Hagan 2015; Menjívar and Kanstroom 2014; Sassen 1988; Schierup et al. 2015). At the same time, the racialization and criminalization of migrant workers can render them even more vulnerable (Almaguer 1994; Bonacich, Alimahomed, and Wilson 2008; De Genova 2004; Molina 2014), creating leverage for many employers in the workplace relationship (Izcara Palacios 2010; Rodríguez 2004; Saucedo 2006). The continuing existence of segregated labor markets has meant that many migrant workers are incorporated as a cheap and disposable labor force in industries that have degraded working conditions. In many ways, the pandemic has accentuated the status of migrant workers as “indispensable but disposable” (Rocco 2016): indispensable as a supply of cheap and docile labor needed to carry out specific processes of production but considered replaceable as racialized and legally precarious individual workers (Mahmud 2014; Ribas 2016; Stuesse 2016).

In Oregon, migrant workers are often found in industries and workplaces such as construction, janitorial service, and forestry work where wage theft, violations of safety and health regulations, and misclassification are prevalent. Andres came to Oregon when he was nineteen years old and worked in the forestry industry for thirteen years. He enjoyed the outdoors and working in the forest. However, during his time in the industry, Andres experienced much abuse from employers. He explained that it was common for employers to steal hours, refuse to pay him properly, and force him to work under unsafe conditions. Andres's story is unsurprising, as the forestry, agriculture, and construction industries have some of the highest rates of workplace accidents in the United States.

In 2018, Oregon's agriculture industry had the highest number of workplace fatalities, followed by transportation and construction. These three industries have been among the top four industries for fatalities in each of the

previous ten years (OR-FACE 2020). Wage theft, misclassification, and discrimination are also prevalent. Corinna Spencer-Scheurich, director of the Northwest Workers Justice Project, explains that employers often fail to pay accrued overtime, workers do not get proper breaks, and temp or staffing agencies make extra deductions from workers' paychecks. Nationwide, in 2020, workers in low-wage industries with a high concentration of migrant workers were due over \$127 million in unpaid wages in cases that affected over 138,000 employees (Figure 2). Over the past decade in agriculture, over 13,000 workers have filed claims for over \$51 million (Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division 2021). In Oregon, between 2006 and 2019, workers submitted claims for unpaid wages totaling over \$50 million (Oregon Center for Public Policy 2021).

Figure 2
Wage Theft : Low Wage, High Violation Industries

| FY 2020 | | | |
|------------------------|---------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Sector | Cases | Back Wages | Employees |
| Food Service | 4,551 | 38,616,790 | 39,404 |
| Retail | 3,020 | 10,931,746 | 12,929 |
| Construction | 2,991 | 34,535,715 | 24,787 |
| Health Care | 1,257 | 13,500,790 | 18,206 |
| Agriculture | 1,036 | 7,172,827 | 11,175 |
| Hotels and Motels | 645 | 2,464,165 | 3,784 |
| Guard Services | 548 | 6,682,070 | 6,230 |
| Janitorial Services | 460 | 3,544,663 | 3,247 |
| Auto Repair | 442 | 2,909,843 | 2,465 |
| Child Care Services | 434 | 991,052 | 2,112 |
| Temporary Help | 331 | 1,817,194 | 2,820 |
| Landscaping Services | 230 | 729,849 | 1,431 |
| Apparel Manufacturing | 128 | 1,690,750 | 829 |
| Hair, Nail & Skin Care | 102 | 1,407,609 | 7,861 |
| Totals | 16,405 | 127,724,912 | 138,711 |

Additionally, workers experienced lengthy workdays and long work weeks, many of them on shifts of over ten hours for six or seven days a week. Unpredictable schedules were also common, contributing to the fluctuation of workers' income and their precarity. Aldana, a food processing worker, explained that while she has a starting time at her job, there is no finishing time, something quite common in the industry. This means that while she must arrive at the plant at 6:30 am, she never knows when she

will be done. Aldana reported that “sometimes I have worked until 10:00 pm, and other times, I’m done by 2:00 pm,” which in turn means that her paychecks also vary considerably.

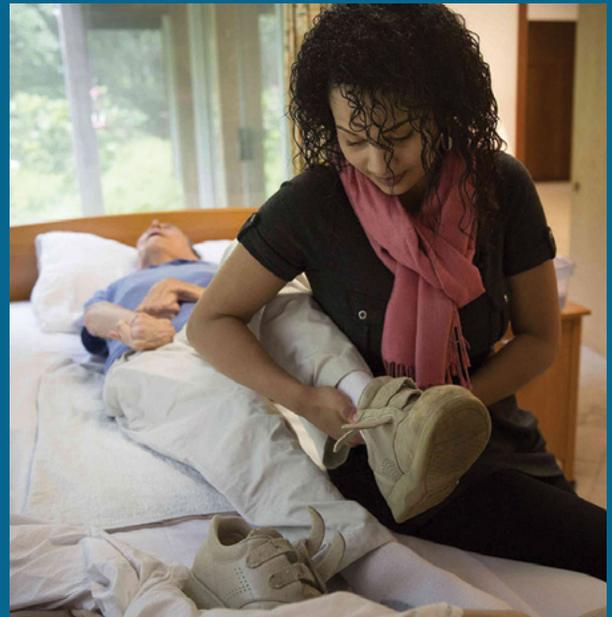
At the same time, migrant workers struggled to find jobs that matched their skills and interests. Work in the fields is usually most readily available but is poorly paid and physically demanding, with little to no growth opportunities. After many years working in the fields, Roberto explained that he finally took a chance and applied for work at a construction company where he gained skills that eventually enabled him to run his own business on the side. “I wish I had known better and tried to change jobs sooner,” he concluded. “When you first get here, you do not know the right people who can show you the ropes and [you] feel like your only options are the forest or the fields.” Arturo had a long career in communications before moving from Mexico City to Oregon at 38 years old. With a college degree, he thought he would find professional employment, but he soon realized that his lack of English proficiency acted as a barrier. A cousin helped him get a job in the fields, something he had never done before:

“I was doubly defeated, I did not have the skills I need to do well in the fields: climb trees, pick berries, I didn’t have any experience and I was really slow, but I also felt defeated because the other Latinos would tell me ‘you are an educated person, what are you doing here, this is not the place for you’, but I didn’t have anywhere else to be.”

Language barriers also limit workers’ ability to self-advocate, as they rely on others to translate for them when they need to communicate with managers and human resources personnel. As the only Spanish speaker in her workplace, a hospitality business on the Oregon coast, one of our respondents recalled being constantly yelled at for not fully understanding instructions in English. She was later fired for refusing to sign a warning in English that she was unable to read. While many workplaces with high numbers of Spanish speaking workers have increasingly hired bilingual supervisors, research has shown that lack of English proficiency has continued to limit workers’ labor mobility and capacity to speak up

Arturo, who later worked as a caregiver for many years, explained:

“you are dealing with people who are not used to interacting with people who are not like them, and they see you, your brown skin and the family members would say ‘I don’t want that man treating my mom’...and what can we do?”



regarding their working conditions (Johansson and Śliwa 2014; Polanco and Zell 2017; Thorstensson Davila 2008). Workers also lamented the continuing presence of racism in the workplace. The structural consequence of these requests led to Latino workers often being assigned to patients with more severe health or behavioral issues, thus increasing their likelihood of exposure to physically dangerous situations.

Several women recalled encountering sexual harassment in the workplace. Ada, a cannery worker, described how she and many others who work with her had to endure the ongoing harassment of male supervisors. Upper management ignored her pleas for action: “I tried to talk to the shift manager, but he just said I needed to show the supervisor respect.” Often, refusing sexual advances meant losing hours or being denied better job opportunities. As Tania, another cannery worker recounted, “I knew there was an opening in Quality Control, and I told the manager I was interested in it. He replied that it was up to me, that if I was ‘nicer’ to him I had a shot. Of course, I never got the position and have been a general laborer for over 15 years.”

Women workers that we interviewed found themselves disproportionately in charge of caring for children and adult dependents (Clawson 2014; Grzywacz et al. 2009; Vesely, Goodman, and Scurlock 2014). Most of the women we interviewed experienced struggles with childcare, especially in sectors of the economy with unpredictable schedules, a finding affirmed by the research of other scholars (Henly and Lambert 2014). As Marta lamented:

“When my kids were growing up it was really hard to get childcare, and I didn’t have my mom, their grandma, here to help me. I think about it and it makes me wanna cry, it was really hard. I had to beg people around us to help me, kept changing babysitters every year, it was hard, my kids didn’t want to stay with them. But this is how this country is, we had to work.”

In other instances, it is precisely the presence of other family members, also women, that allows migrant workers to juggle work and family. “I work nights, so I take my

kids to my sister’s home. In the morning, I pick them up along with hers and I take care of everyone during the day,” explained Josefina. Limited access to reliable childcare adds an extra burden for migrant women who must double as caregivers for their children and other family members’ kids while working exceptionally long hours at their own jobs.

Becoming “Essential”

COVID-19 has accentuated the many challenges already faced by migrant workers. While some found themselves suddenly out of work (i.e., those employed in the service sector, particularly in food and hospitality), others determined that they had no option but to continue working even if they felt unsafe. David, a sanitation worker, expressed his anxiety about working under COVID-19 conditions:

“I was worried about COVID-19, we think it’s dangerous, and we understand we are old and it’s riskier for us, but we are essential workers, and we need to keep going so we try to be safe.”

Workers in essential industries like food processing have often found themselves at the sites of serious COVID-19 outbreaks. In Oregon, the second highest number of workplace outbreaks (after public administration which includes outbreaks occurring at correctional facilities) emerged in food and beverage manufacturing, where over 30 percent of the industry’s workers are immigrants and refugees (Stuesse and Dollar 2020, Kerwin and Warren 2020). Largely outdoor industries also were not spared, with agriculture experiencing the eighth highest number of COVID-19 cases in the state between June 2020 and March 2021 (Oregon Health Authority COVID-19 Weekly Reports June 3, 2020 - March 10, 2021).

As cases of infected workers grew, many companies were slow to implement safety measures and provide Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), accentuating feelings of anxiety and fear. A cannery worker employed on the Oregon coast reported that in late April 2020, her employer was not providing masks or enforcing any social distancing measures. An agricultural worker divulged that she and several of her family members were denied access to water and sanitizer while working during the summer.



Photo: Unsplash.com

“After repeatedly asking the mayordomo for water, he brought one bottle, for everyone, no cups nothing, they were expecting all of us to share and I was very thirsty because it was really hot but I was not going to drink from there.”

After they complained about these conditions, the worker and her crew were told there was no longer work for them. A sanitation worker employed in a hospital explained that when the pandemic started, she was not provided with any masks as they were reserved for the nurses and doctors, even as she had to work in close contact with biohazards, which triggered much anxiety for her.

For temporary agricultural workers holding H2A visas, the situation was even more dire. Jenny Pool Radway, director of Consejo Hispano, an advocacy organization based on the Oregon coast, explained that when severe outbreaks occurred at several canneries, many H2A workers were being housed in hotel rooms that lacked proper facilities for cooking or laundry. Workers in more precarious migratory statuses could not access unemployment benefits if they were unable to work or had fallen ill. They were often not able to return to their jobs after missing work for a few weeks due to showing COVID-19 symptoms. According to our interviewees, in some cases workers’ contracts were terminated, and they were sent back to their home countries even as they were still

fighting the disease. As both advocates and scholars have shown (Brownell 2010; Christine Knott 2016; Rathod and Lockie 2010), migrants with temporary visas usually face not only degraded working conditions but also lack the tools and resources needed to resist or change their situation. Although many migrant workers remain reluctant to challenge their working conditions, their lack of status or capacity has not stopped some from speaking up and fighting for their rights.

Struggling for Better Working Conditions

Advocates, workers, and organizers explain that there has been an increased fear and distrust of governmental actors in recent years due to the increased criminalization and persecution of migrants, especially under the policies of the Trump administration. This rising anxiety had clear consequences during the pandemic as reflected in the wide disparity between workplace outbreaks in certain industries and the number of OSHA claims pursued by workers. While food processing workers represented almost 15 percent of those affected by COVID-19 in the state, less than 0.5 percent filed claims with Oregon OSHA (Oregon Health Authority COVID-19 Weekly Reports June 3, 2020 - March 10, 2021).

Additionally, public agencies have seen their capacity for inspection and enforcement reduced due to budget cuts. Even if migrant workers have felt more confident in speaking up about their workplace issues, public agen-



Photo: Unsplash.com

cies often lack the ability to help them. Due to limited resources, they have restricted the number of claims they are able to process. In the past three decades, Oregon's Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI) has experienced substantial staff reductions, while the state's workforce has grown. In 2019, the agency had half the capacity it had 25 years ago. For example, in the 1993-95 budget period, BOLI had 3.5 staff persons devoted to investigating wage claims for every 100,000 workers. However, by the 2017-19 budget period, BOLI had just 1.8 employees investigating wage claims for a similar number of workers (Oregon Center for Public Policy, 2019). Importantly, even when claims are processed and employers found guilty, only one percent end up paying penalties for their violations (Bauer, 2021). Frequently, calculations of potential retaliation versus limited possibilities of success have convinced migrant workers that it is not worth the risk to pursue a workplace violation claim.

However, there are still cases where migrant workers have taken legal steps to counter employer abuse. For example, when Andres was fired after refusing to perform unsafe work, he contacted a group of lawyers in Portland who helped him file a lawsuit against his employers. He said that at that time he finally learned about his

rights, he did not realize how poorly he had been treated. The experience with the lawsuit and with the advocates who helped provided him with a sense of pride and justice. He observed that many employers "feel they can do whatever they want, particularly to immigrant workers who do not speak English and do not know the laws." But the lawsuit changed that, and he was able to show the employer that he, too, had rights and could fight for himself.

Migrant workers have also led impressive unionization campaigns to improve their working conditions. In 2016, the majority migrant workforce at an industrial bakery in Portland came together to try to win union representation. Diego, a worker who became involved in organizing, explained that until a union organizer approached them, he and his co-workers were not aware of their workplace rights. They were working long hours without being properly paid overtime, they were constantly threatened with termination or, in some cases, deportation, and many had suffered considerable injuries due to inadequate safety protections. The union organizers spoke Spanish, hired interpreters that spoke the other languages represented at the plant, and provided workers with a sense of belonging and community. Many workers noted that the organizing effort represented the first time in which they felt treated

as people with rights that deserved acknowledgment and respect. Gloria, another activist involved in the organizing, expressed approval that:

“the union was going to force them [the owners] to respect our rights, demand that they follow the laws that they don’t follow.”

Although the campaign failed, the workers who led the drive started a class action lawsuit to reclaim their lost overtime wages and in 2020 signed a settlement agreement providing up to \$580,000 in back wages (REYES, et al. v. PORTLAND SPECIALTY BAKING, LLC).

The COVID-19 pandemic has also meant the renewal of collective struggles in other industries with migrant workers. Teresa, a cannery worker, reached out directly to OSHA when she realized her employer was not following Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines. The farmworkers who were denied water decided to start a lawsuit against their former employer. Elaborating on the impetus for such actions, organizers and advocates we interviewed explained that the pandemic brought together many organizations that had been working separately, producing a synergy that has translated into new coalitions working to improve migrants’ working and living conditions. It is also noteworthy that Oregon is one of the few states that has extended comprehensive workplace protections for workers by making its temporary COVID-19 rules permanent, an important achievement attributable to the joint efforts of public agencies, advocacy groups, unions, and workers. These examples, which comprise just a small part of all the collective organizing spearheaded by migrant workers in Oregon, illustrate the meaningful ways in which migrant workers contribute to advancing workers’ rights and transforming working conditions in the state.

Workplace Integration for Immigrants and Refugees: Apprenticeship and Career Pathways

We now turn our attention to two notable arenas, joint union-management apprenticeship training in the building and construction trades and community college “Career Pathways” programs, where the workplace integration of immigrants has advanced under the aegis of

intentional public efforts. These efforts reflect the awareness that integration of immigrants is a “highly local, two-way process engaging all key actors in a community,” with “the bulk of this work done locally through consortia of community organizations, educational and training institutions, businesses, unions, ethnic-serving organizations, government policy makers, and research institutions” (Creticos, Schultz, Beeler, and Ball, 2006). Apprenticeship training and Career Pathways programs often involve other “key actors in a community,” providing excellent examples of collaborative efforts that have helped first and second-generation immigrants and refugees find more remunerative, fulfilling forms of employment and experience a greater sense of social belonging and security.

With ambitious proposals to rebuild and expand the nation’s infrastructure gaining political momentum, it appears likely that the construction industry will be tasked with assuming a larger social role. Approximately 14 percent of workers in Oregon’s construction industry are immigrants, and this percentage is likely higher if both first and second-generation immigrants are included in these calculations (Siniavskaia, 2020; American Immigration Council, 2020). Apprenticeship occupies an essential place in the building and construction trades, featuring “learn while you earn” training that combines in-class instruction with on-the-job experience, eventually resulting in certifications that move the apprentice to the status of a journeyperson who is fully qualified to work in a particular craft or trade.



Photo: Next Academy, Unsplash.com

63 percent of active construction apprentices in Oregon receive training through programs administered by labor unions and contractors, commonly known as Joint Apprenticeship Training Committees (JATC) (Stepick and Manzo, 2021). At their inception building trades unions were dominated by native-born white workers, but their ranks expanded to incorporate European immigrants over the course of the twentieth century. However, unions in the trades often sought to restrict entry into their apprenticeship programs to protect jobs for existing members during economic downturns, maintain hard-won labor standards, and reserve valued positions for family members and relatives, often along racial, ethnic, and gender lines (Zieger, 2007). This history of exclusion sharply limited opportunities for people of color and women and until recently, frequently extended to immigrants as well. However, many building and construction trades unions have committed themselves to recruiting a more diverse cohort of apprentices, resulting in greater numbers of immigrants and children of immigrants entering their ranks.

In the interviews we conducted with apprentices and apprenticeship program officials, we sought to capture the work histories of immigrants, their pathways into apprenticeship programs, their experiences learning their craft, and the impact this training has had on their social and economic integration. Although the stories our interviewees told each had their own unique elements, we did find consistent themes in their experiences that attest to the powerful integrative role played by apprenticeship. Initially, many of those we interviewed began working in service occupations such as fast-food restaurants, gas stations, retail stores, and landscaping, or in jobs related to agriculture or forestry. Because much of this employment paid low wages, respondents often reported that they worked multiple jobs (e.g., morning and evening shifts at fast food establishments or stringing together part-time jobs) to provide for themselves and to send money to their families back home. Almost all recalled working alongside their parents and families from an early age, with second-generation immigrants remembering these experiences quite vividly. As carpenters' apprentice graduate Valentina Campa explained: "I've worked my whole life. My dad taught me a work ethic." George Rivera, a first-year laborers' apprentice, echoed this sentiment, recalling that his father "put a good work ethic in me."

Most of our interviewees discovered apprenticeship programs by word of mouth rather than a conscious process of outreach or recruitment. Jaime Garcia, a journeyman in the painters union, learned about the opportunity through a company superintendent he had encountered, and Roman Ramos, now an organizer for the painters union, received encouragement from a coworker at a glass company where he was employed. Others had family members who alerted them to apprenticeship opportunities. For example, Jose Ambriz Calderon, a second-year laborers apprentice, learned about the program through a cousin who serves as a union representative. In preparing for apprenticeship, several people noted the importance of obtaining their G.E.D. through community college programs and credited such programs with helping them improve their language skills. Additionally, many cited the roles of both formal and informal mentors as critical to their successful completion of apprenticeship programs. Noting the challenges she faced as both a Latina and a woman during her apprenticeship, Valentina Campa recalled being counseled by three women, each of whom

“mentored me in their own way; they all have their qualities.” She concluded: “I had a lot of good people also looking out for me. And it’s what has allowed me to be successful.”

These observations support research that intensive coaching along with other forms of support are vital in helping immigrants successfully navigate and complete apprentice training (Unity Council, The Construction Trades Workforce Initiative, and Social Policy Research Associates, 2020).

Universally, the people that we interviewed praised the rigorous training they received as apprentices and the profound impact it has had on their lives. Aida Aranda, the apprenticeship training director for Laborers Local 737, recounted how she has often seen new trainees from immigrant backgrounds who were initially “shy, hesitant, and not wholly confident” gain the skills and self-assurance needed to work successfully in the field. As one of the first immigrants in the glaziers' apprenticeship program in the late 1990s, Roman Ramos recalled the many technical concepts he had to master, including understanding blueprints and engineering specifications needed to make buildings “earthquake proof.” Others

expressed pride in gaining certifications to operate certain kinds of equipment, work on different types of projects, and learn about important safety procedures. Many of the apprentices and journeymen we interviewed cited the strong commitment to safety that was prominently featured in their training. This commitment to safety is critical given the dangers often encountered in building and construction. And, as we have seen in our earlier discussion about essential workers, this commitment holds special meaning for keeping job sites safe under COVID-19 conditions.

Our respondents spoke with passion and conviction about the powerful sense of belonging, personal efficacy, and social connection that they gained through their involvement in the apprenticeship program and the union. For some, earning substantially higher wages than they had received in previous employment held multiple meanings. As Jeorge Rivera explained:

“The money I’m receiving is more than I ever received in any other job. I actu-

ally feel like I have a path to follow, and I know I have the support that I need to accomplish the things that I want.”

He then made a critical distinction in describing the impact of apprenticeship and union membership on his sense of aspiration: “it’s not a job; it’s a career.” Roman Ramos commented on the pride he felt in gaining a greater sense of self-sufficiency and highlighted its larger social implications:

“By getting the apprenticeship, I was proud to be head of the household providing for my family... and not be a weight to the state or the taxpayers. So that helped make a difference.”

Several of our interviewees have gone on from apprenticeship to assume larger responsibilities, including serving as a job site foreman, working as an instructor in the union’s apprenticeship program, and joining the union staff as an organizer. And as many building trades



Photo: Unsplash.com

unions have intensified and expanded their efforts to attract a more diverse pool of apprentices, apprentices from immigrant backgrounds are increasingly assuming roles as recruiters, mentors, and instructors, creating a pipeline for extending the integrative benefits of apprenticeship more broadly.

In addition to apprenticeship, Career Pathways programs offered throughout Oregon's community college system represent another significant example of workplace integration for immigrants and refugees featuring collaborations involving a cross-section of institutional players. Although Career Pathways is not solely aimed at immigrants, "community colleges have understood that building career pathways for immigrants is both a social justice imperative and essential for the state's economy and workforce" (Kinder and Goldberg, 2019). Established in 2004 as a pilot program and extended to all Oregon community colleges three years later, Career Pathways offers a series of vocationally oriented certificates approved by the state and developed in consultation with local stakeholders based on labor market and industry needs. These "stackable" certificates, which can be obtained in less than a year, prepare students for specific job opportunities and create cumulative knowledge that enhances both short and long-term prospects for immigrants and refugees. As Career Pathways administrator and program consultant Marc Goldberg noted in an interview, "what was visionary in Oregon was the idea that these certificates would be credit bearing and be embedded within a two-year degree for a career technical education program." A "Career Pathways Alliance" has helped develop a more systematic approach by drawing on the expertise of participants from community colleges across the state and incorporating input from other key actors (e.g., employers, community-based organizations, social service agencies, apprenticeship boards) (Kinder and Goldberg, 2019). This collaboration reflects the broad community engagement, ongoing working relationships, and continuous evaluation seen as critical to successful workplace integration strategies for immigrants and refugees at the local level.

Career Pathways offers a broad array of certificates, including but not limited to HVAC (heating, ventilation, air conditioning) and facilities maintenance training, early childhood education, health care occupations, machining, welding, automotive technology, and business administration. Program staff noted the progression or "career

ladders" that students can climb within occupational areas. For example, the initial HVAC certificate offers students family wage jobs and after working in HVAC installation, some students have gone on to join the Sheet Metal Workers Union for additional training or went on to gain a facilities maintenance degree. One Career Pathways administrator noted there are "a ton of different jobs" in critical arenas such as health care that offer the opportunity to begin at an entry level and advance in the field. Several community colleges have worked to erect a career ladder in childcare and early childhood education, responding to shortages of early childhood teachers and the growing demand for universal pre-kindergarten programs. Currently, immigrants comprise nearly one out of every five early childhood teachers in the U.S. and are often well-positioned to help address the needs of a racially and ethnically diverse pre-school population. As Lulos Claude, a Haitian immigrant enrolled in Mt. Hood Community College's early childhood program remarked:

"I love children and it's so close to social work. It's not just teaching children to read and write. No, it's to teach them how to be ready for life, for the future"

The colleges pursue a range of recruitment strategies, beginning with outreach to existing students in ESL (English as a Second Language) and basic skills classes who receive encouragement to continue their learning through Career Pathways. These students often alert members of their families and their communities to the program's offerings, and in some cases members of the same family go through the training together. Other recruitment approaches encompass connections with local workforce agencies, referrals from community-based organizations, tabling at community events, and appeals made on Spanish language radio and television. These overlapping efforts serve to develop "extended networks within the immigrant community" and "create relationships over time" that build credibility for Career Pathways and attract new cohorts of students. However, several of our interviewees noted decreased enrollment in their programs more recently, which they partially attributed to Trump administration policies that discouraged immigrants from seeking financial support and made them fearful they would be considered "public charges" ineligible to obtain permanent resident status. Presumably, the rescinding of these policies by the courts may ease this concern as a

barrier to Career Pathways enrollment.

Although limited resources have not allowed Career Pathways programs to compile systematic data on their achievements, officials do note high certificate completion rates among immigrants and refugees and reporting from both participants and employers affirming their successful workplace integration. As we saw with apprenticeship programs, many of our respondents underscored the vital importance of providing students with strong mentoring and navigational support to address issues that arise during their matriculation (e.g., job placement, finances, childcare, transportation, course selection).

This “wraparound support,” combining elements of coaching, advocacy, and counseling, helps students

“navigate cultural norms they are not familiar with” and realize that they have a “team of people supporting them.” As Angelique Kauffman-Rodriguez, a Career Pathways workforce development specialist at Mt. Hood Community College, observed, “If you don’t have the human connection, it doesn’t work.” Kate Kinder, the Career Pathways director at Portland Community College, agreed, asserting that “having coaches and navigators is really key,” providing holistic support... that helps students navigate resources and policies and [knowing] your rights.”

In spite of its progress and successes, Career Pathways officials note ongoing funding challenges given limited federal and state support that must be shared among all of the state’s community colleges. These shortfalls mean that Career Pathway programs must continually cobble together resources to maintain their services. Many cited the critical importance of providing the wraparound services vital to participant success and highlighted the need for adequate funding to sustain this navigational support. A new model allowing community colleges to receive funding to help support students who receive SNAP benefits and augment this support with matching funds from private sources has shown some promise, and Mt. Hood Community College has received several grants

from the Oregon Department of Education to help establish its childhood development associate program. This kind of support reflects the conclusion of an Aspen Institute study on the value of Career Pathways programs and the need for additional funding: “Building better systems for immigrants and their families is not only important for our labor force but also for the social cohesion of our communities” (Montes and Choitz, 2016).

We conclude with a brief list of policy recommendations that aim at providing greater protections for immigrants doing essential work and offer additional opportunities to advance workplace integration.

Stronger Enforcement of Labor Law and Protection of Workers’ Rights

We encourage the investment of greater resources in key agencies such as BOLI and OR OSHA that will enable them to enhance their investigative capabilities, deter illegal employer behavior, and ensure that workers’ rights are respected. We support BOLI’s use of a “strategic enforcement” approach that attempts to address the limitations of complaint driven processes by focusing attention on industries with histories of labor law violations. We also urge exploration of “just enforcement” strategies that would supplement state agency activity under certain conditions by allowing workers and allied organizations to sue employers for ignoring or violating labor laws.

Continuing Support for the Oregon Worker Relief Fund

The Oregon legislature and the city of Portland have allocated funds providing temporary financial support for essential workers, many of them immigrants, who were ineligible to receive unemployment insurance or other forms of federal assistance during the pandemic. The fund also provides support for agricultural workers and other workers forced to quarantine due to COVID-19 conditions. Community organizations from across the state have been charged with distributing these funds, which have been augmented by private contributions. The relief fund represents a small but significant commitment by public and private entities that recognizes the essential work of immigrants, provides much needed financial support, and offers a collaborative model worthy of extension.

Expanding Integration Efforts Associated with Apprenticeship and Career Pathways

Extending apprenticeship and community college Career Pathways programs that promote immigrant and refugee integration to wider audiences would build on these successful models and allow them to maximize their potential. Apprenticeship programs, which have explicitly been seeking to recruit more diverse cohorts and make job site culture more welcoming, can expand their outreach to immigrants and their families through more extensive forms of recruitment and increased collaboration with community partners. With more sustainable and secure funding, as Kristen Kulongoski of Mt. Hood Community College has explained, Career Pathways programs could pursue expanded apprentice and pre-apprentice initiatives in new fields aimed at immigrants and refugees, making what another Career Pathways official has described as a “holistic investment in adults in the state” that would pay large social dividends.

Establish a State Level Task Force or Working Group on Immigrant Integration

As an April 2020 *New York Times* article observed, the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that “worker well-being is the foundation for everything else,” and we have become acutely aware of the indispensable contributions made by immigrant workers in shoring up this foundation (Miller, 2020). In recognition of these contributions, we recommend the creation of a state level task force or work group with broad stakeholder representation that includes the voices of immigrants and refugees. This task force would consider ways to build on current efforts, deepen and expand collaborations among key actors, and develop intentional policies offering enhanced possibilities for workplace integration.



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John Arroyo
Department of Public Policy,
Planning, and Management
University of Oregon



Chapter Seven

Immigration, Arts, and Culture: Painting a Canvas for Newcomers in Oregon

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Introduction

Oregon is changing. What was once a state with deep roots in white utopia and long-seated racial divides is undergoing a strong racial and ethnic demographic shift. One out of every 10 Oregonians is foreign-born, and one in nine Oregonians is a native-born person with at least one immigrant parent (American Immigration Council 2020). Immigrants in Oregon comprise 10 percent of the population, form the backbone of the state's economy as employees and entrepreneurs, and play an integral role in the civic life of their communities. In essence, Oregon would not be a successful state without the presence of immigrants, refugees, and asylees.

While the U.S. collectively experiences the effects of racial reckoning, Oregon's position as a new immigrant gateway poses vast issues for the access to and provision of quality of life services ranging from housing to arts and culture.¹ As the state diversifies, lessons from other new immigrant gateways (Marrow, 2011) indicate the winds of change aren't always easy for newcomers and the host societies to navigate.² This is especially true in a state with a large level of working-class and white populations. On the one hand, newcomers each have specific needs that frame their unique migration experience in traditionally non-ethnically and racially diverse places like Oregon. On the other hand, both the country and the state of Oregon desperately need to identify opportunities to circumvent the schisms that invariably arise in new immigrant gateways.

Artists and arts and culture organizations have an opportunity to support these vulnerable populations as well as to celebrate the common threads that bind us together. The arts and cultural sector can serve as a platform to help immigration policy expand beyond consumption programming to one that embraces a broader mission of inclusive economic development, community cohesion, and equitable communities in which all people

1 I define arts and culture through a "creative placemaking" lens. ArtPlace America defines creative placemaking as "the intentional integration of arts, culture, and community-engaged design strategies into the process of equitable community planning and development. It's about artists, culture-bearers, and designers acting as allies to creatively address challenges and opportunities...contributing to community-defined social, physical, and economic outcomes and honoring a sense of place."

2 I define New Americans or "newcomers" as the spectrum of voluntary immigrants, resettled refugees, and asylees at various levels of immigrant readiness (e.g., new arrivals, long-term residents, or the children of immigrants and refugees).

can thrive. This is especially critical as the definition of what constitutes art – and by and for whom – is shifting as quickly as the demographics of the state. No longer is art framed by traditional museums and performance halls that cater to predominantly white patrons and donors.

This chapter identifies the current and future ways in which arts and culture can drive local, place-based outcomes for the immigration sector across the state. For the purposes of this project, arts and culture denote a broader, more encompassing definition that includes both formal and informal traditional and cultural practices as well as those more traditionally understood artistic disciplines: Craft and Culinary Arts; Dance, Design and Architecture; Film and Media; Folk and Traditional Arts; Literature, Music, Theater and Performance; and Visual Arts. Research findings identify four key immigration sector goals for Oregon-based arts and culture organizations including bridging populations, elevating cultural heritage, engaging allies in civic life, and co-creating spaces. Some immigration sector organizations in Oregon are currently employing arts and cultural strategies in their work, and some arts and cultural projects across Oregon are already aligned with organizations in the immigration sector network. This study highlights critical lessons to sustain or catalyze both current and future collaborations between both fields. The fact that many examples already exist is a strong sign of the potential for greater collaboration on common goals as Oregon continues to change in the future.

The union of the immigration and arts and culture fields provides a window into statewide needs at multiple scales of service provision. Furthermore, a seemingly polarizing debate about immigration policy in the U.S. exemplifies the importance of understanding changing ethnic demographics as a value to U.S. society. Lessons from this research offer a foundation for scaling this work across the regional, ethnic, and political domains in similar less-urbanized and more rural-oriented states like Oregon.

Methods and Methodology

Data are drawn from a review of 63 grant funded projects from state-wide funders including the Oregon Arts Commission, Oregon Cultural Trust, Oregon Humanities, Oregon Folklife Network, and the Regional Arts and Culture Council as well as projects funded by over 25 local arts

agencies (arts councils). Projects were analyzed according to eight areas:

- Artistic Disciplines (craft and culinary, dance, design and architecture, film media, folk and traditional, literature, music, theater, and visual arts)
- Newcomer Population (immigrant, refugee, or asylee)
- Stakeholder Type (not-for-profit organizations, civic/social, philanthropy/foundation, government, business, education (university/college), social enterprise, or consultant)
- Type of Work (media, advocate, art-making, policymaking, community organizing, or community development)
- Scale (neighborhood, city, county, or state)
- Geographic Type (urban, suburban, exurban, or rural)
- Region of Oregon (Coast, Central Oregon, Eastern Oregon, Southern Oregon, Portland Metro, or Columbia Gorge)
- Population focus (race and/or ethnicity)

The use of these themes for deductive data collection helped ensure a representative cross-section of arts and cultural projects focused on immigration in the state.

Data were coded in MAXQDA, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) that allowed the attachment of coding categories to relevant parts of primary grant awards documents such as descriptions, applications, press releases, interview transcripts, social media, and local and statewide news. Research findings highlight four ways in which artists and cultural organizations can act as integrated community development allies in local, place-based immigration sector work, helping to bridge newcomers and longer-term residents in working together to create multivalent spaces that signal belonging in Oregon. Arts and culture can:

- Bridge Newcomers and Longer-Term Populations
- Elevate Cultural Traditions as Assets
- Engage Newcomers and Other Allies in Civic Processes
- Co-Create Spaces that Reflect Identity

The four-theme framework employed in this analysis is adopted from “Bridging Divides, Creating Community: Arts, Culture, and Immigration” (2020), a national field scan commissioned by ArtPlace America and Welcoming America and written and researched by me. The scan was based on a comprehensive literature review as well as the analysis of 140 national creative placemaking projects about arts and immigration ranging from advocacy to social service issues.

This chapter applies this national framework for a closer, statewide analysis of Oregon. Together these four strategies can be understood as a typology for “what the arts can do” in the context of immigration work. Each theme is supported by examples (short case studies) that illustrate similar goals between the arts and culture, social service, and immigration sectors.

Contextualizing the Immigration Sector

Immigration is no doubt one of the most pressing if not polarizing topics in the U.S. From the moral responsibility of accepting immigrants and dignifying their humanity to an expanded federal enforcement system, the context of conversations about immigration plays out differently in all newcomer communities, whether they be urban, suburban, or rural. For the purposes of this study, I defined the immigration sector by two key areas: social service and advocacy. Social service organizations provide basic quality of life and civic and legal services (e.g., housing, employment, language education, healthcare, and legal representation). Organizations in the advocacy arena rely on organizing, movement building, and mobilizing to fight anti-immigrant policy and support pro-immigrant reforms such as the defense of undocumented immigrants, family reunification, and sanctuary cities. Contemporary political pressure and new anti-immigrant policies have only added more uncertainty for the immigration sector’s efforts to deliver services and make it more dependent on engaging new allies across the not-for-profit sector.

Contextualizing the Arts and Culture Sector in Oregon

Location: Urban (metropolitan)

It is no surprise that most arts and cultural activity focused on immigration is rooted in the Portland metropolitan region. As the largest urban region in the state as

well as its most diverse region of Oregon (comparatively), Portland also leads with the largest provision of immigrant-serving not-for-profit organizations, foundations, and legal services.

Over the last twenty years, Oregon has attempted to introduce progressive changes that overcome its racist and homogenous history in immigrant integration and policy-making. This approach is well manifested in the Portland metro area, where its designation as a sanctuary city has laid the groundwork for funding, resources, outreach, and representation both in urban and suburban areas. For example, within the last five years, grant programs at METRO (the regional government for Multnomah, Clackamas, and Washington counties) have followed a trend from peer municipal agencies around the county to reposition arts funding within an equitable arts and cultural context.

Location: Rural and Small Towns

While strides have been made at the urban level, Oregon is primarily a rural state. Beyond the I-5 corridor where arts and culture are the backbones of cities like Portland, Eugene (e.g., “City for the Arts”), and Ashland (e.g., Oregon Shakespeare Festival), the most dramatic new settlement demographic shifts in the state are occurring in rural areas. Not unlike other regions of the U.S., hyperdevelopment, gentrification, and rising income inequality have positioned small, non-urban areas as the fastest growing locales in Oregon. For example, places such as Oakridge, Malheur County, and Madras have scant formal or informal arts amenities. However, in Woodburn and Jackson County, the agricultural sector has brought a seismic wave of new (mostly Latino/a/x) immigrants who are reshaping artistic and cultural spaces. Here generational tenure and strong footing in social capital make it possible to expand their reach. While advances have undoubtedly occurred, fragmented political representation in Oregon’s rural counties clashes with the equity and inclusion value sets of large urban areas. This setting provides an ample space for arts and immigration to foment a new and more welcoming atmosphere. “I grew up in rural Oregon and I know first-hand the difficulty families of color can have,” said Dmae Roberts, executive producer of MediaRites and Theatre Diaspora. “Now more than ever we need to create allies and build bridges—not walls, to share stories and insights across our diverse communities toward a better understanding of each other” (MediaRites, 2020). There are numerous local and county art councils and

galleries throughout Oregon, yet many of them do not have a history of representing artists from immigrant communities. For example, cities like Hood River have recognized that their communities are growing and changing and acknowledge the need to provide newcomers a platform and sense of belonging. Seeing this representation is profound both for the state to understand how it has changed in different regions and for community members to have the chance to learn and/or empathize, relate, and appreciate the critical importance of welcoming difference.

How can immigrants build upon the foundations of becoming newcomers in their small towns? Are there not-for-profit organizations and foundations in these regions doing the work? And how can they represent foundations for their future? A scan of the grantees' list of arts councils in the state shows local work disconnected from a broader artistic and cultural network without the assistance of immigrant serving organizations, universities, and other institutions that form the backbone of local communities.

Artistic Medium

While the visual and performing arts dominate the arts and immigration scene in metro Portland, cultural heritage and storytelling are representative of the level of arts and immigration activity in smaller areas. Intergenerational storytelling is the biggest source of immigrant outreach and representation. Successful arts and immigration projects in this area creatively pose the following questions: What does it take for anyone to feel at home? What are the parameters of change, transition, homemaking, support, and the overall feeling of belonging? How are all these concepts magnified through the displacement and relocation prompted by migration? The ability to build bridges to individuals with vastly different experiences is key. Smaller cities have been more responsive to shifting demographics where niche cultural offerings include Oaxacan storytelling, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) representation, and Slavic arts traditions all sponsored in part by immigrant social service organizations in larger cities.

Organizational Structure: Networking

The most successful arts agencies working with immigrants are those that can draw upon a strong network

of private foundations and public grants and immigrant-serving not-for-profit organizations. There is significant legal service counseling for immigrants, refugees, and asylees in Oregon's metro areas, but to what extent does this exist in smaller, rural areas that are quickly changing? How do newcomers transition from one area to the next without losing the ability to creatively engage in their sense of place? Furthermore, the power dynamics of smaller towns in Oregon shed light on the lack of immigrant representation on local art councils, which makes it more difficult to uncover the tacit forms of cultural expression prevalent in ethnically and racially diverse communities. These trends also reveal the limited ability of smaller cities to stay current with newly forming immigrant-serving arts organizations as a response to local issues (e.g., Mi Valle Mi Hogar's work in southern Oregon after the Alameda Fire in the summer of 2020).

Organizational Structure: Funding

Apart from a few long-standing organizations such as PCUN (Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste), Oregon's immigration sector remains nascent. While this is understandable given the work needed to establish initial adaptation, community engagement, cross-cultural interactions, and building from security to equity should also be expressed in plans, opportunities, and outcomes. How does an organization fulfill its mission while also building allyship with arts and cultural groups to foster more engagement with newcomer populations? Such efforts are increasingly important given the arrival experience of newcomers in small, rural Oregon cities (e.g., recent arrival versus second generation). Here the needs are not only different for each person but also for each region based on community size, language barriers, economic opportunity, and social inclusivity. Working with this type of creativity should naturally lend itself to equitable arts and culture programming, enabling Oregon to dig deeper in embracing cultural representation.

Target Population: Independent Artists

Arts and immigration connections in Oregon are rooted in the works of grassroots, community-based individual artists instead of municipal governments. Most – if not all – are based in metro areas. Multnomah County in particular has had a consistent influx of foreign-born populations in the last thirty years. Second-generation im-

migrants have found a home there yet still experience a sense of not belonging and being without representation. Several recent exhibitions demonstrate there are tangible first-hand experiences growing up in Oregon as “Dreamers” that can lead the way for a more stable second generation. This is largely due to the space Oregon offers as a new, non-established gateway to forge new ideas and forms of activism and creativity among younger generations. Combined with Oregon’s naturally creative spirit, newcomers in Oregon are explicitly using arts and culture as a venue to share their life experiences.

This experiential work can serve as a guiding platform for connecting individual arts to more community-driven achievements, one that has experience both in immigrants’ families and the perseverance of creating a new place and living in Oregon as a minority at a time when the state is pursuing change through progressive policymaking. How can these exhibitions act as examples and catalysts for foundations to reach out in future calls to artists? Can these artists act as standard bearers for migrant issues in the state? How can these projects facilitate inter-cultural trust, and steward culture-bearing in places beyond the Portland metro area?

Special Issues: COVID-19

COVID-19 has decimated museums and theaters across the world. While many have stayed afloat with virtual offerings, smaller, less-equipped organizations have often been forced to shutter. How has COVID-19 affected arts and immigration connections in a state like Oregon, one that provides few resources for such work? How are people in the immediate future going to express themselves, come together, and be seen and heard? Oregon has numerous statewide funding foundations, including Oregon Cultural Trust, Oregon Humanities, Oregon Arts Commission, Oregon Community Foundation, and Oregon Metro. Valuable relief funds have been distributed since March 2020, keeping individuals’ creative vision alive, and their cultural heritages intact. Connecting this concept of arts relief to immigration will further embolden integration and recognition in the state.

Throughout many of Oregon’s local and county art councils, celebrating culture is championed as the forefront of their mission statements. COVID brings the opportunity to realign how people from different backgrounds relate to each other at a time when hardship is so easy to relate

to across communities. If statewide foundations can hone community alliances to target outreach to diverse communities, Oregon can establish itself as a model for grassroots multi-cultural integration. Getting everyone out of the shadows will be important as we climb out of the pandemic. Celebrating this reemergence through expressive arts and culture is the vibrant path we all need to understand our common humanity.

Discussion of Four Key Strategies

Four key strategies reveal shared goals and outcomes for arts and culture and immigration organizations. In the past arts and culture has been a temporary or auxiliary element of immigration sector work. Typically, an artist has been hired or volunteered to host an exhibition, donate a piece for an annual fundraiser, produce an event (e.g., cultural festival or parade), or sponsor a film series. In these instances, the political nature of immigration has often been suppressed to leave room for creative expression unburdened by justice issues, traditionally known as “art for art’s sake.” The contemporary context of immigration and its repercussions for human rights have ignited a spark among arts and cultural leaders across Oregon. The connection between arts, culture, and immigration that once seemed unorthodox now appears seamless and viable. Arts and cultural leaders in both large and small cities recognize a stronger platform to achieve their goals exists for collaborative work. There are many ways for arts and culture to support the immigration sector. Strategies included in this support are intended to catalyze or reinforce dialogue about collaborations between practitioners, policymakers, and funders in both sectors.

1) CONTACT BUILDING: Bridge Newcomers and Longer-Term Populations

Oregon’s glide into a new immigrant gateway over the last twenty years has undoubtedly prompted suspicion and fear among the state’s predominantly rural white population. While unfolding gradually, this demographic shift has triggered anxiety and tension ranging from anti-immigrant policies to aggressive violence and the use of scare tactics. Extant populations worry about competing for government benefits, jobs, and increased crime rates. Newcomers wonder if they can safely preserve elements of their heritage such as languages other than English or modify their built environment to include cultural aes-

thetics. Without a robust network of social and municipal services, immigrants, refugees, and asylees face barriers from limited resources that inhibit their ability to become full members of their communities.

Arts and culture help diffuse the tension between new and established populations to show how immigrants, refugees, and long-term residents are interconnected and share common values about family, work, and economic mobility (Fairlie, 2012). This work, often known as “welcoming” work in the sector, goes beyond the provision of basic services (e.g., English as a Second Language or business licenses) to an explicit commitment to support members of the host society or “receiving community” to understand and respect their new neighbors and create new bridges.³

In 2018, Oregon Humanities funded *Stories from the Diaspora*, a special initiative of Portland Meet Portland (PMP), a small not-for-profit organization dedicated to bringing diversity, equity, and inclusion to the forefront of their framework to enable immigrant and refugee voice, agency, advocacy, and accompaniment. PMP was born out of a need to provide immigrants and refugees in Oregon’s metropolitan region an alternative to the ingrained systems of oppression and systemic racism. The organization’s programs center around four themes: civic empowerment; youth leadership development; raising diaspora voices; and community building and organizing. Over 500 immigrants and refugees, 800 low-income individuals, and 3,700 dominant culture white Portlanders have participated in the community dialogues part of PMP programs. With this framework, PMP builds and leverages equitable relationships with immigrants and refugees to support them in creating tangible change in their lives. For PMP, supporting this population involves efforts to enrich and educate the broader community through encouraging cross-cultural learning, promoting balanced dialogue, and increasing mentoring opportunities.

Stories from the Diaspora (2018-19) contributed \$3,500 for a series of transmedia storytelling multimedia and podcasting to amplify the complex perspectives of immigrant and refugee artists in the Portland area. Transmedia

³ **Welcoming** is the term that describes inclusive efforts to highlight the vital contributions of all members of society – including immigrants and native-born populations.



Artist Akram Sarraj, contributor to the Stories from the Diaspora series.

blends multiple digital media forms including comics, film, television, apps, soundtracks, podcasts, online games, social media, e-books, and websites. Three artists have participated in the project to date: Akram Sarraj’s “Art is My Freedom: A Refugee’s Journey from Mosul to Portland,”; “A Sense of Home,” a project about Qudsia Ashan’s journey from “Afghanistan to the Columbia River Gorge and her experience with the Eagle Creek Fire”; and “The World is Full of Lessons,” a poetry multimedia project from Flamur Vehapi, an Oregon-based educator and refugee from Kosovo. According to Sarraj, “I want to make a style for the future. My style is not for this time. For the future” (Oregon Humanities, 2020).

The project blended the unique storytelling traditions of each newcomer’s home society to provide a genuine, open dialogue about the issues they faced adapting to new homes in relation to their native ones. Arts-based storytelling projects such as *Stories from the Diaspora* provide opportunities for contact building across Oregon because they offer an alternative perspective to contextualize contemporary issues (e.g., wildfires) facing Oregonians.

PlayWrite: Healing Dialogues for Refugee/Immigrant Communities (2019) was a similar project in the Portland area. Funded through a \$19,140 grant from Oregon Metro’s Community Placemaking initiative, PlayWrite is a performance art-based program that builds a safe space for expression and creative thinking. The Healing Dialogues



Visual art by Qudisia Ashan, as part of the *Stories from the Diaspora* series. Image: *Portland Meet Portland* and artist Qudisia Ashan

series featured conversations about identity, separation, belonging, coping with trauma, and moving forward with healing and immigrant integration in new communities, including an Intercultural Welcoming Ceremony. Hosted by the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, these expressions took form in short plays under theater lights, where cultural appreciation and room for acknowledgement of their distressing experiences occurred in a family-oriented environment. “We bring creative arts into play in a way that other arts organizations don’t. We do it differently,” said Burce Livingston, executive director of PlayWrite. “I think the thing that distinguishes PlayWrite is that we challenge the writers. We push, push, push. We don’t say, ‘Oh you poor thing, life’s been so hard, you’re wonderful.’ We honor and respect them 10 times more than that. We push: You can do more” (Miller, 2019).

Another project closely associated with PlayWrite and Portland Meet Portland is **Project Untangled**, a project for Middle Eastern refugee children led by Dr. Omar Reda and based out of the Oregon Children’s Theater. Reda is a Libyan refugee and certified psychologist specializing

in psychotraumatology and trauma-informed care. He founded Project Untangled to help refugee youth process trauma through art using a five-goal approach: psychosocial education; training for healthy lifestyles and critical coping skills; a resources center as a support network; “Safe Spaces” monthly meetings and clinical care. In 2019, Project Untangled produced five short plays written by Syrian and Iraqi refugee youth. Themes from the play centered around fear of flying, bullying, death, and abuse. According to Reda, “...All of these are thoughts and worries that come into their mind. So, we thought we’d bring healing to these children by giving them a safe space, giving them a voice and a platform. And with that, this is how they do: They blossom” (Miller, 2019).

The type of contact building at the foundation of *Stories from the Diaspora*, PlayWrite, and Project Untangled is especially important in parts of the country where economic restructuring and population decline have adversely affected the livelihoods of the population, regardless of newcomer status. More and more communities have realized that they need a comprehensive agenda for en-

sureing they are creating a welcoming community for all. However, in the absence of a positive overhaul to federal immigration policies, attention at the local level provides the best option for a dignified approach to changing migration patterns.

Three Immigrant and Refugee Stories on Exclusion and Inclusion (2019) was a play created by Media Rights' Theater Diaspora, a not-for-profit organization that produces award-winning documentaries, theater, and outreach programs. Funded through a \$1,000 grant from Oregon Humanities, the hour-long play highlighted the stories of newcomers living in Hood River. Stories performed by three artists (Samson Syharath, Sofia Molina, and Larry Toda) focused on the intersection of race, gender, national heritage, and the overall struggle to find acceptance and understanding in the context of a small city in Oregon. The three pieces included Syharath's "See Her Strength," a story about a gay Laotian man that honors his refugee mother's strength, Molina's performance of "Carmelita," a piece by Yasmin Ruvalcaba that recalls her mother's experience escaping hardship and violence to cross the Rio Grande River to America, and "Harvest," written by Dmae Roberts and performed by Toda as a reflection on the family of an Asian American women and the history of Oregon's exclusion laws.

The piece was part of a larger production titled "Here on This Bridge: The -Ism Project," originally directed by Catherine Ming T'ien Duffly and made possible with funding from The Regional Arts and Culture Council (RACC), Ronni Lacroute, and The Collins Foundation. A total of six monologues about tolerance, understanding, and bridging divides was produced for a tour that included performances, community dialogues, and workshops in Beaverton, Hood River, McMinnville, and Corvallis. The performance was followed by a panel discussion on the history of immigrants and refugees in Oregon moderated by Dmae Roberts, executive producer of MediaRites and Theatre Diaspora, along with Dr. Linda Tamura, a Hood River native, author, and Willamette University emeritus professor. Tamura spoke about Executive Order 9066 that led to Japanese American internship during World War II and its effect on Hood River *issei* (first-generation Japanese American) and *nissei* (second-generation Japanese American) in Hood River. According to Roberts,

"Three Immigrant and Refugee Stories comes at a time when we need to create bridges – not walls, to share stories and insights across our diverse communities toward a better understanding of humanity. We wanted to bring these stories to smaller towns across Oregon in hopes that it will lead to an enlightening talk with audience members about exclusion laws and its impact today on immigrants and refugees."

Columbia Gorge News, 2020

Heldáy de la Cruz's *We the Dreamers* had a similar effect, focused on the stories and portraits of ten DACA recipients. *We the Dreamers* was a response to former Attorney General Jeff Sessions's announcement of the end of the DACA program in 2017, which affected 800,000 people by making them vulnerable to deportation. The show aimed to humanize immigrant youth in precarious situations and encourage the southern Oregon community to recognize the civic contributions of undocumented immigrants in the region beyond stereotypes and racial tropes. According to the artist who is originally from Mexico,

"Talking about it, normalizing, I guess, the idea of this movement with family and friends is super important. Calling representatives and voting, also important. And then committing to showing up. I think that sometimes we all get really fired up about some big injustice, and we wanna show up, and we wanna be there. And then when the movement keeps going, we tend to drift away from it because we did our part and we showed up the one time. So I think, to me, this is something that I found really important, is the commitment and the follow-through with showing up for communities."

Affect Conference, 2018

Along with other immigrant artists, De la Cruz has also been featured in the ACLU of Oregon's annual **Uncen-**

POWER TO THE DREAMERS



Piece from Artist Heldáy De la Cruz's "We the Dreamers" exhibition.

sored Celebration, a poster-based exhibition about freedom of expression and social justice (screen prints and limited-edition prints).

In urban areas, the theme of contact building has catalyzed bridging between immigrant and non-immigrant groups at the same degree it has generated new connections between immigrant artists. In 2020-21, the Portland

Institute for Contemporary Art hosted **We Got Each Other's Back**, a long-term documentary project by interdisciplinary artist Carlos Motta in collaboration with artists Heldáy de la Cruz, Julio Salgado, and Edna Vásquez and co-curated by Roya Amirsoleymani, PICA Artistic Director and Curator of Public Engagement, and Kristan Kennedy, PICA Artistic Director and Curator of Visual Art. The core of the project was a three-part, multi-channel video

installation based on the portraits and experiences of predominantly queer and openly undocumented artists and activists in the U.S. The exhibition was supplemented by live and online international events and public programs. The three parts included: Narrative Shifter; A Portrait of Julio Salgado and Heldáy de la Cruz: *Desierto a desierto* (Desert to Desert) and Edna Vázquez: *Si se puede* (Yes You Can).

A commentary on contemporary immigration policy in the U.S., the central focus of the project was the role intersectionality (sexuality, immigration status, gender, ethnicity, race, and class) plays when portraying the lives of the most marginalized newcomers. According to Carlos Motta, “the project emphasizes the importance of thinking about the intersection of identities as foundational to understanding the levels of oppression faced by undocumented migrant communities in the U.S. The artists openly speak about how being undocumented and being queer represents both a challenge and an opportunity to speak against systemic discrimination on the basis of gender, sexuality, ethnicity and immigration status” (McLaughlin, 2020). The exhibition included a timeline of key U.S. legislative and community-based efforts surrounding migration between 1982-2020. Fundraising for the project was donated to **Pueblo Unido** PDX and the Voz Workers’ Rights Education Project.

Each of these six projects illuminates the challenges communities face to find generative, creative, and collaborative ways to explore commonalities and encourage “contact building” between new and existing groups, especially when related to unspeakable traumas. The arts provide a healing environment for contact building strategies to create opportunities for civic engagement, inspire stronger bonds, and build meaningful contact to center difference as a benefit (Downs-Karkos, 2019). Contact building is a term inspired by Gordon Allport (1954), an influential psychologist who developed “contact theory” as a way to explain how a focused, common goal reduces prejudice across different people. For newcomers and longer-term populations, contact building works to find value between both groups by encouraging more frequent and deeper individual interaction and engagement.

Best realized in a two-way dynamic, lessons from contact building between immigration, arts, and culture reveal that many longer-term residents do not have frequent contact with people from different backgrounds. Since these

types of connections do not happen organically, community leaders must commit to intentional efforts to bring people together and establish bonds that shift perceptions from “us vs. them” to a collective “us.” Not surprisingly, there is limited time, resources, or capacity for building common bonds for under-resourced immigrant and social service not-for-profit organizations, nor is there sufficient security to inspire experimentation.

2) CULTURAL HERITAGE: Elevate Cultural Traditions as Assets

The ability to adapt to a new society while maintaining the heritage of your native society is a generative space for arts and culture. Specific skills and services such as legal services, education, and language provision require nuanced approaches to gaining a holistic view of the challenges newcomers face. In many ways, the previous experiences of newcomers and their connection to their heritage have a profound effect on how well they incorporate. A movement towards a comprehensive asset-based approach model provides a valuable and effective format for bridging cultural traditions and social services. The following four projects illustrate how an asset-based model draws on connections to cultural heritage in immigrant and refugee communities while at the same time highlighting untapped core strengths that help newcomer adaptation to the U.S.

Stories My Father Told Me is an ongoing, eight-part series of first-hand experiences organized by the Portland Chinatown Museum and funded through a \$1,000 grant from Oregon Humanities. The project assembled a diverse array of storytellers to recount their Asian American immigrant experience across multiple generations. In 2019, Tracy Wong, founder of WONGDOODY ad agency and Portland native, performed “Stories My Mother and Father Told Me: Tracy Wong – Stories of My Dad: Jewish baseball Legend, Civil Rights Activist, Human Shield, and Mayor of Chinatown.” Another performance was by renowned writer and choreographer Dmae Roberts, who also screened her 2015 short film *Mei Mei: A Daughter’s Song* and read from her recent book *Letting Go Trilogies: Stories of a Mixed Race Family* (2016). The value of the series is the layer of history provided about Portland as both a historic and contemporary center for Asian American immigration. At the center of each of these pieces is a thread between the cultural clashes Chinese immigrants experienced in the old Chinatown area of Portland during

the 1950's and '60's. Other events included performances by Diana Lo Mei Hing, siblings Melvin, Terry, and Fran Lee, and Patsy Fond Lee and Kenneth Fong. Stories ranged from fleeing China during the Cultural Revolution and the challenges of preserving identity in a foreign country to life and business ownership in Portland's early Old Chinatown after World War I.

Migrating Bodies: For(saking) Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness (2020) was an exhibition at the Schneider Museum of Art at Southern Oregon University co-curated by Jill Hartz, former executive director of the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, Scott Malbaurn, director of the Schneider Museum of Art, and Richard Herskowitz, artistic and executive director of the Ashland Independent Film Festival (AIFF). Five artists addressed

global migration and the outcomes that ensued in adjusting to their new locations while feeling the loss of leaving their country of origin for reasons beyond their control. Through visual art, cultural object showcasing, storytelling, and documentation of cultural erasure, each artist explored the meaning of displacement and identity through multiple mediums that highlight personal and historical perspectives. Artists included Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Mohau Modisakeng, Tannaz Farsi, Superflex, and others.

An exhibition at the Columbia Center for The Arts in Hood River and The Dalles Art Center presented **Consciousness: Contemporary Printmaking in Oaxaca: Honoring the History of Printmaking for Social Justice and Change**, where 27 artists from around the world (Oaxaca, Mexico, South Africa, Chile, Canada, and the United



Advertisement for Contemporary Printmaking in Oaxaca traveling exhibition. Image: Abigail Merickel and associated artists

States) showcased original artwork in both Spanish and English from their time at the famous Rufino Tamayo Studio in Oaxaca, Mexico. Through the art of printmaking, the work was tied together and shown in multiple galleries reflecting overarching themes of freedom, social justice, immigration, identity and place, and the environment. The show was curated by local artist and teacher Abigail Merickel, funded by Marylee Hattenhauer, and supported by the Wasco County Cultural Trust Coalition in publishing the exhibition catalogue.

There is Land Over the Ocean (The Immigrant Story), an exhibition shown at the beginning of 2021 at Portland International Airport featuring multiple artists, refers to the moment of seeing land after arduous traveling by ocean on migrant boats to America. In Oregon, the Portland International Airport serves as localized port of entry symbolic of Ellis Island. In the art of narration, the immigrant story gives these experiences grounding and relatability among these artists through the inspirational hardships immigrants and refugees experienced when searching for a new life based on hope. This exhibition focused on cultural pride and exposure in a new setting

aimed at supporting community advocacy of integration while retaining one’s cultural heritage. The backdrop of Portland at PDX’s International Terminal shows Portland’s embrace of diverse histories.

Each of these four examples visually illustrates how the arts can harness the innate cultural power of immigrants and reorient negative stereotypes. From performances such as *Stories My Father Told Me* to exhibitions like *Migrating Bodies: For(saking) Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness*, *Consciousness: Contemporary Printmaking in Oaxaca: Honoring the History of Printmaking for Social Justice and Change*, and *There is Land Over the Ocean*, exchanges such as these position immigrant and refugee communities as both the beneficiaries and co-creators of services and their future lives in Oregon.

3) COLLECTIVE CAPACITY: Engage Newcomers and Other Allies in Civic Processes

Cross-sector strategies are the key to success between collaborative immigration, arts, and culture projects in the twenty-first century. Previously, immigrant-serving organizations were specific to one group, but now strict breaks from ethnic distinctions have provided a new



Image: Sankar Raman, *The Immigrant Story* www.theimmigrantstory.org

form of allyship that did not exist before. At the core of these strategies are shared values that envision a more just future. This intentional transition in organizational programming – if not mission – provides an opportunity to build cross-sector coalitions in existing community arenas that newcomers may already frequent. The reshaping of the immigration sector has also been a boon to establishing a new generation of advocates comprised of both documented and undocumented immigrant youth (Walter and Uitermark, 2016). Such a phenomenon has inspired new support for immigrant-focused civic issues and local-level leadership positions on boards and political representation.

Bridging Refugee Youth and Children’s Services (BRYCS), a long-standing not-for-profit organization based in Washington D.C., facilitates newcomer youth development programs throughout the country. Their mission is to expand the young voices in the immigrant and refugee community to create greater personal development, innovative expression, and stronger inclusion and awareness. **Art for New Immigrants** was a joint project between BRYCS, the Oregon Folklife Program (OFP), and the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO) that successfully combined social service and arts programs to expand the network of resources to immigrant artists and area organizations. Special projects under this umbrella have included *The Arts Opening Doors*, (2000-2001), *In My Country* (2001-2003) and *Youth Traditional Arts Classes* every year from 1999-2004. In 2004, the National Endowment for the Arts, Oregon Cultural Trust, and Spirit Mountain Community Fund funded the inter-generational *Refugee Elders Traditional Arts Program (RETAP)* program, which consisted of video documentaries, publications, and a series of youth traditional arts classes and community arts events. In 2005, funding from the National Endowment for the Arts and The Oregon Arts Commission, the Fund for Folk Culture, and The Collins Foundation allowed the *Arts for New Immigrants Program* to sponsor *Creating Access for Refugee and Immigrant Traditional Artists (CARITA)*, a showcase of refugee and newcomer traditional arts at local arts festivals across Oregon.

The Oregon Community Foundation, in tandem with The Collins Foundation, the MRG Foundation, the Meyer Memorial Trust, and the Pride Foundation, joined financial and technical assistance resources to form the Oregon Immigrant and Refugee Funders Collaborative (OIRFC). The

purpose of the OIRFC was to create a pooled and aligned fund to coordinate a framework that addresses newcomer issues in Oregon and to support local organizations with appropriate resources. Efforts were coordinated across funders and community organizations, including a shared application and reporting. One funded project was the **DACA Immigrant and Refugee Fund**, a creative, collaborative initiative to aid immigrants and refugees in Oregon by enabling smaller organizations to apply for support. Organizations (including arts organizations) that provide legal aid services and representation, outreach and education, research and analysis regarding immigration, and/or civic engagement and advocacy can submit proposals for small or large requests, with large requests exceeding \$50,000 over a 12-month period.

A group of undocumented writers and poets including Yosimar Reyes (guest curator), along with Karla Cornejo Villavicencio, Marcelo Hernandez Castillo, and Jose Antonio Vargas collaborated on **We Didn’t Arrive Here Alone**, a virtual live-streamed program of readings and discussion at the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art in February 2021. The exhibition offered thought-provoking discussion for undocumented peoples in a new world regarding migrant rights and the collective responsibility to uphold values for those forced into displacement. *We Didn’t Arrive Here Alone* also provided an opportunity for helping to develop allyship in creativity, love, and self-determination. According to Reyes, “The conversation we are having is geared for an undocumented audience. Topics that we will be discussing are the writer’s journey, mental health, and the overall sense of where we are now as a community. By having these three notable figures in conversation with one another, the hope is to take inventory of the ways in which undocumented communities have always had to rely on one another to make it in this county. *We Didn’t Arrive Here Alone* places the undocumented as the agents of the story and not just a subject” (PICA, 2021). The program was funded in part by Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery, Reed College, Dr. Bronner’s Family Foundation, PNCA MA in Critical Studies, and the Multnomah County Cultural Coalition.

Arts and cultural projects can support collective capacity by recognizing and convening allied partners in other sectors that intersect with the immigrant community. They can also reframe policy issues in a welcoming mode and establish safe spaces that inspire newcomers to be



We Didn't Arrive Here Alone artist Marcelo Hernandez Castillo.
Image: Portland Institute of Contemporary Art

more engaged in the local civic life of their communities. In some cases, the process arts and cultural practitioners undergo when working with immigrant communities is more important – and rewarding – than the proposed finished piece. For some projects, these art platforms gleaned important information about specific immigrant lives and needs, statements that may not have been revealed in other public or political settings. For others, arts and culture served as a proxy for learning about new centers, services, or policies. Such regional cultural partnerships are important for introducing immigration advocacy opportunities to new and different stakeholders. The birth of a new generation of advocates encourages immigrants to integrate into non-immigrant-focused spaces and build capacity across organizations that serve their communities.

A challenge for arts groups in Oregon and other new immigrant gateway states is the high level of distrust of government and authorities at every level. For some new-

comers, especially asylees and refugees, political instability and corrupt governments are what forced them to flee their countries in the first place. When such fears materialize, they translate to apathy. The strength of sustained arts, culture, and immigration work in Oregon requires a deeper statewide ecology of municipal and not-for-profit organizations. Lessons from these creative projects also shed light on how cultivating long-term relationships outside of the arts and immigration sectors is a difficult but essential step in grasping local issues.

4) CO-CREATION: Co-Create Spaces that Reflect Identity

The settlement areas of newcomers in the U.S. are foundational to how and when they engage. Over the last 20 years, immigrants have bypassed historic immigrant enclaves in metro centers in exchange for rural and suburban areas. As these places became the primary centers for immigrant settlement, they also became the new centers of poverty and multilingual communities (Glazer, 1963; Massey, 2010). This shift led to a rise in anti-immigrant sentiment that has provoked new debates about claims to membership in American society. Whereas some newcomers are settling in these gateways directly from their home countries, others are products of internal migration from earlier residence in a large urban center (Portes and Rumbaut, 1996). Cities and towns at the center of these new settlement patterns are unprepared for these seismic demographic shifts, as is evident in their inability to provide adequate services they are historically expected to receive from their urban counterparts.

In reaction to these developments, Oregon Humanities partnered with **The Immigrant Story**, a team of more than 20 local volunteer journalists, storytellers, photographers, graphic designers, and marketing specialists based in Oregon, Washington, Indiana, and Tennessee. Each member works to create stages and platforms for the voices of immigrants and refugees across the country. The mission of the project is to “foster empathy and build a more inclusive community by sharing immigrant stories.” Stories are documented and archived in short, accessible visual and written formats to provide a curated experience in what defines inclusive community. Stories reflected the experiences of groups such as DACA recipients, Muslim women, and refugees. In 2020, Oregon Humanities provided \$3,000 to showcase four unique

stories about the difficult events that brought these people to the United States and the need for specific services and resources that reflect their newcomer experience.

Make | Learn | Build is a program of the Regional Art and Culture Council (RACC). The program exists to provide greater flexibility for artists and art-based businesses in Multnomah, Washington, and Clackamas Counties, with a focus on equity and racial justice as a response to feedback received by Black, Indigenous, and other artists of color in the region. The grant allows for funding in three categories: **MAKE** (the creation of work in any artistic discipline), **LEARN** (artistic or administrative learning, skill building, or professional development that improve your art practice or business), and **BUILD** (a transition or pivot for an arts business or operations, including purchase of equipment or staffing costs). Immigrant artists, who are particularly underrepresented, are encouraged to apply for any artistic discipline or area associated with professional development. Funding is offered in \$1,500 and \$3,000 increments for applicants who meet criteria to serve underrepresented communities. The goal of the program is to work alongside specific communities and use art to collaboratively spotlight the needs of underrepresented communities.

Make | Learn | Build is a companion project to the Regional Arts & Culture Council's (RACC) **Arts Equity Grants**, a program that was launched in 2016 to provide financial support to organizations in Multnomah County and the City of Portland conducting arts and culture projects and programming for geographically underserved neighborhoods, communities of color, immigrants and refugees, persons with disabilities, LGBTQ communities, homeless and houseless communities, and other underrepresented populations. The fundamental goal of the program was to provide equal access to the fundamental right of arts provision and creative expression. Two cycles of Arts Equity Grants were funded in 2016 and 2017, before RACC integrated the program into their larger Project Grant program, which also allowed individual artists to apply.

In 2017, RACC provided \$126,540 in grants to 24 organizations that met the criteria of conducting arts and culture projects for underserved communities. One recipient was the Slavic Community Center of Northwest, a Portland-based organization whose mission is to help their



Graphic for Make | Learn | Build Grants in Oregon

community members in education, employment, health and wellness, social services, and career and business development while maintaining their cultural heritage. RACC awarded \$5,000 to the Slavic Community Center to arrange a cultural music event for Slavic immigrants that featured local musicians performing Russian-composed music to help community members learn about and become involved in the multiple community services provided by the center. The importance of offering a space for inter-generational Slavic immigrants that would otherwise not have the opportunity to connect with their cultural traditions was just as important as offering a space for non-Slavic immigrants to learn about Slavic culture. Other immigrant and refugee-focused recipients included the Hmong American Community of Oregon, Instituto de Cultura y Arte In Xochitl In Cuicatl, Jim Pepper Native Arts Festival, Kukatonon Children's African Dance Troupe, Latino Network, NAYA Family Center, Portland Interfaith Gospel Choir, and PreSERVE Coalition.

In Portland, Verde, Native American Youth and Family Services (NAYA), Hacienda Community Development Corporation, Habitat for Humanity, and Portland Parks and Recreation each partnered to develop, finance, and maintain Cully Park in an industrial section of eastern Portland. The organizations conducted over 225 surveys with community members about their needs and conducted outreach activities that involved 612 community members, including 191 youth. To date, more than 40 funders

have contributed over \$10.9 million to build a co-created and shared space between Latinx, indigenous, and other groups in the area.

These five projects reveal that physical sites for newcomers in new gateways are even more critical than they are for immigrants in established ethnic enclaves. Other efforts highlight the ability for institutions to respond to the needs of their community in creative ways. A trend in the building of these spaces (parks, landscapes, plazas, and cultural community spaces) is the intent to serve the general community rather than a specific ethnic or immigrant group. Whether grassroots or top-down efforts, the process surrounding attention to civic services in Oregon provides ample lessons for the needs of newcomer groups. “Co-creation” in this context allows artists and culture bearers an integral opportunity to work with the community from the beginning rather than as an afterthought. In newcomer communities, this type of co-creation also uncovers and preserves culinary or artisan traditions as a strategy to build stronger inter-generational ties and leadership development in Oregon’s second generation – the future of political and civic life across the state.

Conclusion

This study of immigration’s relationship to arts and culture projects has analyzed current and future trends in Oregon. By combining two otherwise disconnected sectors (arts and culture and immigration), I have provided a roadmap to establish a foundation where newcomers in Oregon can build stronger relationships with extant populations (“contact build”), preserve traditions (“cultural heritage”), re-envision capacity and service provision (“collective capacity”), and construct common spaces (“co-create”). As demographics continue to shift – and immigration may become a more polarizing issue in the U.S. and specifically across the Pacific Northwest – these four key strategies and their attendant burgeoning examples provide innovations from policy reformation to the community-led physical building of space.

Arts and culture can generate inter-racial and inter-ethnic bridges between new and longer-term populations by increasing empathy. Place-based arts and cultural activities that embrace the diversity of the human experience, regardless of national origin, can bring people together for shared experiences. Many of these bonds often remain obscured because new and established populations

purposefully disregard their connections to each other. According to cultural anthropologist Dr. Alaka Wali (2002), bridging differences collectively, building capacity, and strengthening community networks through informal artistic activities leads to more organic bonds. While such opportunities remain rare in both large and small rural towns in Oregon, the featured case studies in this chapter reflect trends in storytelling, visual art, and performance that offer newcomers a new form of previously untapped agency through creative expression.

For Oregon, a state with a history of deep-rooted exclusion against immigrants and other underrepresented populations, newcomer waves should be seen as a benefit. Local level work remains a critical arena for considering how a partnership between the immigration sector, arts, and culture can paint a canvas for newcomers – and all – of Oregon in the coming decade.

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Lisha Shrestha
School of Social Work and Research
Portland State University
Executive Director, Division Midway Alliance



Chapter Eight

Newcomer Refugee Integration: A Culturally Specific Approach to Engage and Empower

No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark– Warsan Shire

The greatest nations are defined by how they treat their weakest inhabitants.– Jorge Ramos

Background

People move from one place to another in search of better opportunity, knowledge, and safety. Rebuilding a life as an immigrant or a refugee in a new country cannot be narrowly defined as “resettlement” or “assimilation;” this approach can negate the contributing value of social, cultural and human capital that newcomers bring to host societies. “Integration” has been widely used to appreciate and be inclusive of the different values of immigrants and refugees. Snel, Engbersen and Leekers (2006) define “integration” as a multidimensional process of incorporating newcomers into an existing social system. This approach ensures the importance of collaborative processes of both receiving and newcomer communities, increasing the likelihood of together building a more secure, vibrant, and cohesive shared society. In contrast, assimilation manifests a unidirectional, one-sided process in which immigrants and their descendants relinquish their culture and adapt completely to the society they have migrated to. However, an Integration Framework provides a useful social space where community, social, and cultural norms, and values can be appreciated. When integration at the local level proceeds with the help of mutual assistance associations, non-profits, and faith-based institutions early in the resettlement process, newcomer refugees gain confidence, greater social and economic stability, and can more readily thrive in their new socio-cultural environment.

Defining Integration

Integration has been widely discussed as a policy measure for the immigrant and refugee resettlement process. Integration has not fully evolved as a theory, but it has been used as a framework to understand the degree of refugee and immigrant incorporation in the host societies. The concept has emerged over the past two decades and challenges previous notions of nation building, assimilation, multiculturalism, and cultural pluralism adopted by different host societies. Robinson (1998) and Castles et al. (2007) conclude that there is little prospect for a unifying definition because the concept is controversial, and there is no single theory that holistically explains the integration process. As cited in Ager and Strang (2010), Saggar proposes understanding and implementing integration as a concept and framework that varies across different countries’ sense of identity and nationhood. Looking at the different approaches adopted by host societies, newcomer integration is most frequently discussed as “civic integration” with an underlying connotation of an assimilationist approach. Historically and politically, integration has been influenced by the concept of nationhood and a

complete submergence into a host society's norms, values and traditions.

The most recent definition of integration from the European Commission (2004) states that "integration is a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of the Member States." Some contemporary studies suggest that integration lies beyond political incorporation and should focus instead on social, economic, and cultural integration (Snel, Engbersen and Leekers, 2006; Ager and Strang, 2008; Heckmann, 2005). This study sees the importance of a "two-way process" of integration that fosters understanding and builds relationships between both hosts and newcomers. Integration opens prospects for inclusion on both sides and assists in the formation of shared identity. A sense of nationhood may encourage newcomers to become politically engaged by gaining citizenship, learning about rights, and contributing toward building one national identity. However, building national identity does not ensure that a newcomer will feel accepted in the new society. As an interviewee in the London borough of Islington observed: *"You can feel you are settled-in. But in a.... you feel they isolate you.... They say, "You Foreigners- go home again." They don't say "hello" ...not warm, not friendly"* Ager and Strang (2008).

Integration also means making newcomers feel at home, realizing that they belong to society and ensuring they live in an environment that is safe and secure. Without developing a sense of belongingness, newcomers may not fully excel in building relationships, crafting identities, or exploring new opportunities. They can feel confined to their own ethnic associations. Therefore, the "two-way process" demands some contributions from the host society in creating conditions that promote a positive integration process.

Why Do We Need Integration?

1,204,148 refugees have been resettled in the United States between 1999-2019. According to the 2020 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) report, about 80 million people had been forced from their homes due to persecution, conflict, and human rights violations. This total included 45.7 million internally displaced people (IDPs), 26.3 million refugees and others forcibly displaced outside their countries, and 4.2 million asylum seekers. The United States resettled less than 0.12

percent of refugees (30,000) in 2019, which is one of the lowest annual figures in its recent history. In 2019, the top five countries sending refugees to the U. S. for resettlement were Congo, Burma, Ukraine, Eritrea and Afghanistan. Even though the number of refugees arriving in the United States has diminished in recent years, the range of experiences, skills, social, and cultural capital they bring remain valuable to the United States.

Newcomer refugees can provide skilled sources of employment; they are in high demand and hired mostly by manufacturing, food supply chain industries, the hospitality industry, and for health care and caregiving jobs (New American Economy, 2020). According to the latest data from a 2018 American Community Survey, health care is the second most common field for refugees in the United States, with 15.6 percent of all refugees working in this sector. Even during the pandemic, they have risked their lives as frontline health care and essential workers.

Kloosterman and Rath (2002) suggest that immigrant and refugees' small businesses are affecting advanced economies in positive ways by contributing to the revitalization of underserved urban neighborhoods and by fostering new spatial forms of social cohesion. A study by National Immigration Forum (2018) indicates that immigrants (30 percent) start businesses at a higher rate than the U.S. born (13 percent), and refugee-owned businesses generated \$4.6 billion of income in 2016. Despite the significance of their economic contributions, newcomer entrepreneurs struggle to find opportunity structures such as market conditions, access to ownership, and acceptance of their innovative approaches by government policy.

Despite their contribution to the social, cultural, and economic capital of the United States, refugees encounter numerous acculturative resettlement stressors and racial biases during this process. Most of the refugees are resettled in poor and unsafe neighborhoods where they are employed in low paying jobs and face immense language difficulties. A research study by Curry-Stevens and Sinkey (2016) documents the racial economic gap between newcomers of color and white newcomers, finding that the average median income for newcomers of color dropped from \$14,481/year to just \$9,304/year while for white newcomers, median income increased from \$26,760 per year to \$47,718/year.

Racial disparities, unequal wealth distribution, and institutional barriers are some of the factors that hinder newcomers' path to success and their ability to thrive in host societies. Besides these factors, loss of cultural identity and lack of civic engagement challenges their ability to develop their potential. Assimilationist policies imply the loss of one's distinct cultural identity (Creatura, 2017). These policies often include an evaluation to determine whether the refugee or immigrant has successfully adopted cultural customs. Conversely, the integration approach embraces the multicultural aspects of identity and respects the cultural heritage of the group by encouraging the development of mutual relationships between the host and newcomer society. Integration approaches include access to education and language training, culturally specific approaches to service delivery and vocational training, and leadership building through civic engagement.

Integration Challenges and Barriers

According to the Pew research group in 2013, second-generation immigrants and refugees outperformed their first-generation parents in educational and economic attainment, wealth generation, civic engagement, and home ownership. It is the first generation that struggles and sacrifices as compared to their offspring in their quest for integration. Studies by Curry-Stevens and Sinkey (2016) and Esses and Medianu (2012) explore key challenges faced by refugees and immigrants in the United States and Canada. Both studies highlight the importance of language acquisition, education and employment, access to affordable housing, home ownership, civic involvement, and health care as key arenas for integration, along with the ability to navigate administrative systems, including government benefit programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), credit and banking, and the justice system.

Certain communities may have more access to resources and information based on their resettlement location, language skill, social bonding, and bridging capital. However, such resources may be less accessible to a newcomer refugee from a rural area (country of origin/refugee camp) with no literacy or language skill. For example, refugees with no English-speaking skill or literacy cannot navigate the basics of scheduling appointments with their local resettlement agency or medical providers. They

must rely either on a community member who speaks the language or an interpreter. Resettlement agencies may lack case managers or staff who speak the language of newcomer refugees. Moreover, refugees receive benefits for a period of only 180 days or six months. Subsequently, they must stand on their own feet, find a job, be able to communicate in English, and function independently. This situation is very stressful for someone who has lived most of their life in a collective society and in different infrastructural settings. Therefore, these communities rely on Mutual Aid Associations (MAA) or Small Ethnic Based Organizations (SEBO) to get support. Newcomers who enjoy social bonding or ethnic solidarity with other members of their group usually get support from an MAA and SEBO. These are small organizations (mostly non-formal), culturally specific, and led by local community leaders who provide support to newly arrived refugee groups. According to Ranard (1990), they function primarily in six areas: cultural preservation/social activities; religious services; special constituency groups; resettlement support; business and economic development support; advocacy; and political action. Even with the support they provide, these groups are mostly volunteer driven and lack sufficient funds to run the organization smoothly and provide resources to continue the programs.

It is therefore important to consider these organizations as essential vehicles for the successful integration of newcomers. These organizations can provide a platform that enables newcomers to establish their lives in a new country while retaining an important part of their identity. Barriers to integration can be mitigated if MAAs are empowered through capacity development resources and training and serve as a bridge builder between newcomers and host societies. MAAs also act as a liaison between local resettlement agencies and different city/local programs.

Domains of Integration: Structural and Socio-Cultural Integration

This chapter uses a framework developed by Ager and Strang (2008), which includes four key elements: markers and means (employment, housing, education, and health); social connections (social bridges, bonds, and links); facilitators (language and cultural knowledge); and foundations (rights and citizenship).

In the current literature, access to rights, citizenship, housing, employment, health, and language acquisition fall within the domain of structural integration (Heckmann, 2005). However, these constructs do not adequately explain how each of these domains is measured and the factors affecting these processes. One important way to explore the integration process is to understand the role of resettlement agencies in helping refugees learn the local language, access public assistance programs, find employment, and secure housing. However, the same approach does not generally apply to immigrant groups, because they cannot receive the same public benefits as refugees do under federal law. Bernstein (2018) reports that a wide range of additional issues such as overall well-being and social connection are crucial for understanding integration, but these outcomes are difficult to explore using available census data.

Both Heckmann (2005) and Ager and Strang (2008) explain socio-cultural integration through formation of social connection, language and cultural knowledge, and membership in different voluntary organizations. This includes individual or institutional interactions within the same or a different group. When people interact, they form relationships which supplement other indicators of structural integration. This kind of socio-cultural integration strengthens social capital for both hosts and newcomers.

Culturally Specific Model: Key to Structural and Socio-Cultural Integration

This section explores a culturally specific model used in the designing and delivery of programs and services to newcomer groups and explains its importance in enhancing social bonding, bridging capital between host society and newcomer group, and promoting positive experiences to help newcomers establish themselves in their host society. Culturally Specific Organizations are local, small organizations led and staffed by persons of color that primarily serve communities of color. At the local level, Multnomah County has formally adopted a definition of a culturally specific organization into policy (Curry-Stevens, Delony and Morton, 2019). The key elements of such organizations are:

- Majority of agency clients served are from a particular community of color.
- Organizational environment is culturally focused

and identified as such by clients.

- Prevalence of bilingual and/or bicultural staff reflects the community that is served.
- Established and successful community engagement and involvement occurs with the community being served.

This definition has been retained for the last 14 years and expanded with new standards adopted in 2014: that the staff, board, and leadership reflect the community being served and the community being served recognizes the organization as a culturally specific organization.

There are several studies that identify the reasons behind failure in program design and delivery of mainstream services to marginalized communities of color. Because of this failure, many culturally specific organizations have emerged. The culturally specific organization values the socio-cultural capital of the newcomer groups and designs and implements its programs through a strength-based approach. Curry-Stevens, Delony and Morton (2019) discuss seven assets of culturally specific services built through experiences and lived experiences of service providers, many of whom were service users. The seven assets are:

- a. Inclusivity as opposed to “Outsider” status
- b. Integration with community served
- c. Advocacy Involvement
- d. Holistic Response to Need
- e. Relationship, Respect and Recognition
- f. Having a Tied Future (a social work practice reflecting the belief that regardless of one’s privilege, culturally specific service providers and the communities being served can make positive changes, liberate, and dismantle oppressive systems)
- g. Sidestepping Imperial Roles and Relationships

Based on their seven years of dialogue with the community, these authors added three additional assets to their list:

- a. Respite from Racism
- b. Speed of Trust
- c. Social and Economic Capital

These ten assets align with the Ager and Strang integration framework which includes structural and socio-cultural integration. The following section explores different

aspects of a culturally specific service model that intersects with this structural and socio-cultural integration framework.

1. Holistic Approach to Basic Need: Pathway to Structural Integration

A culturally specific service model uses a holistic approach to address basic needs of newcomers such as help in navigating housing, employment and government programs such as TANF, SSI and SNAP as part of their case management. Well-established community-based organizations serving refugees such as the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO) in Portland use this approach to assist the newcomer refugee. They provide pre-employment training to newcomers where they learn vocational English that helps prepare them to enter the job market.

Surya Joshi, a program coordinator at IRCO's Workforce Development Program, outlined the application of this holistic approach:

“We use a career plan model in order to closely match the training and education that a participant acquires from their country of origin or refugee camp. We provide language-based services to our participants, explore their career interests, enroll them in the respective training programs and help with job placement. We do so by collaborating with WorkSource community colleges like Mount Hood and Portland Community College, and labor unions. In this way, we act as a bridge builder between newcomer groups and the labor market.”

This narrative shows the importance of culturally specific approaches in service delivery that support newcomers in moving toward structural integration. For example, participants enrolled in this workforce development program gain skill through training, find stability through income generation and, start building bridging capital with the support of case managers at IRCO. The same participants can further use their social bonding capital to inform

other members within their ethnic group and refer them to the program.

2. Inclusivity, Advocacy and Relationship Building: Pathways to Social-Cultural Integration

In this section, I draw on my ten years of experience and interaction with newcomer groups while working at IRCO and the New Portlanders program at the City of Portland to demonstrate the strong relationship between Mutual Aid Associations (MAA) and newcomer communities that helps build a positive integration process. Celebrating their cultural events and festivities generates a sense of pride for many groups, strengthening their ethnic bonding and preserving their identity. However, due to the assimilationist notion of the resettlement process, the inability of mainstream service agencies to provide welcoming and inclusive community spaces and a lack of resources, newcomer groups are often deprived of celebrating their cultural festivals. Beside advocating for the newcomer groups before the city council, the New Portlanders Program also helps in bridging resource and opportunity gaps and connecting and working closely with more than 20 mutual aid associations.

In 2017, one of the MAAs, the Oregon Bhutanese Community Organization (OBCO), faced difficulties in finding a space to celebrate their annual festival “Dashain” and lacked funding to pay for logistics, space, and support to community performers. The New Portlanders program connected the group to different city bureaus to seek financial assistance. The program received support from the Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT), the Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability (BPS), and a local neighborhood prosperity initiative, the Rosewood Initiative, which provided community space to organize the event. The event was a success bringing joy and a sense of pride to more than 200 Bhutanese refugee community members. It also helped establish relationships between city bureaus and Bhutanese groups as exemplified by the presence of an information booth on transit safety and materials on other resources. These types of interactions and events promote intercultural dialogue and the building of bridging capital between newcomer and host society members.

3. Case Study- Integration by Practice

This section explains some of the culturally specific programs designed and implemented by a local Neighborhood Prosperity Initiative (NPI), the Division Midway Alliance, over the past three years. These programs reflect the effectiveness of culturally specific efforts to support the integration process of newcomer refugees. There are seven NPIs in the city of Portland.

The Neighborhood Prosperity Network is a Prosper Portland program designed to support social equity-based community economic development at the neighborhood level. The network is part of a broader citywide initiative to foster economic opportunity and vitality.

The Division Midway Alliance is strategically located in one of East Portland's most diverse districts. It is home to many long-time East Portland residents, first and second-generation immigrants, and newly resettled refugee groups. More than 50 percent of the population belongs to limited English Language proficiency groups, and 70 percent of the students in the area's David Douglas School District are from bilingual/multilingual households.

Due to the ethnic composition and unique issues faced by the population in the district, the organization conducted a community visioning session in 2018 with 90 community members from five different groups: Bhutanese; Burmese/Karen; Latino/Hispanic; Somali and Pacific Islanders. Out of the many issues shared, common themes identified across the five groups included access to culturally specific services (e.g., language access), community gardening, Civics 101 and English language classes, leadership building, small business support, and community/business incubation space.

As a result of this assessment and visioning session, the organization hired community leaders to become cultural liaisons. Cultural liaisons are trusted members of the community who speak the community's language, share their lived experience, and act as bridge builders.

With the help of the liaisons, the organization was able to create meaningful outreach and engagement with the underserved newcomer refugee groups. This approach helped the newcomer community and their organizations to form a sustainable path toward positive integration.

As cited in Curry-Stevens (2016) and Covey (2006), these interactions exemplify the creation of "speed of trust," establishing a relationship that quickly moved from the societal level to the relational level. With the help of liaisons and use of culturally specific approaches, the following programs were implemented:

Building Bridges Through Taste of Nations:

This is one component of the annual Festival of Nations event in the outer South East Division Corridor. Four community chefs from Vietnam, China, Cameroon, and Burma were trained on working in a commercial kitchen, observing the county's health and safety guidelines, and gaining greater understanding of pricing and customer service. Division Midway Alliance provided funds for the purchase of ingredients and offered 50 percent of the sales to the community chefs. This event helped in capacity building, knowledge development among the participating chefs, and creating space for intercultural dialogue with the members from the mainstream host society. These types of interaction help build bridging capital and expand the scope of inter-group relations.

Capacity Building and Leadership Development: Connecting to Community Gardens and Youth Environment Leadership Program

The Burmese/Karen community comes from agrarian



Karen community chefs selling their traditional food and interacting with the festival attendees

societies where community members are passionate growers and enjoy close relationships with soil and plants. Farming is a way of life for many in their home country of Burma and in the refugee camps in Thailand where they also resided. Community members, especially elders, missed this experience after resettling in Portland and sought opportunities where they could build skills to grow food and practice English. The organization connected 13 Karen refugees to the Oregon Food Bank (OFB) Seed to Supper Garden program. They led six-week workshops and afterwards, 13 households received a plot of land to grow plants.

Similarly, through the Youth Environmental Leadership Program (YELP), six youth leaders and 22 of their peers were part of a leadership training program. Most of the youth are first-generation refugees and some were second-generation immigrants. All of the youth from Myanmar and Bhutan were newcomer refugees (e.g., less than eight years in the United States) whereas youth from Latinx, Chinese, Pacific Islander groups were second-generation immigrants. The organization collaborated with the Bureau of Environmental Services (BES) to design the training, and six youth leaders were trained during the first round. In turn, these youth leaders became trainers and recruited other youth from their community. The goal of this training was to build leadership skills and provide civic in-



Karen community members learning about community gardening at the Oregon Food Bank

In 2019, Ner Moo, a Karen community member and Seed to Supper Garden Ambassador co-facilitator, explained:

“This has opened a new door for my community to learn about growing food. This is one way of connecting people back to something they were familiar with. Over the past few months, I took the garden ambassador training with OFB and now I share my knowledge back to my community. I am excited to organize the first gardening workshop in Karen language for my community members.”

One of the youth shared that engagement was better because,

“it was easy and fun to learn from the youth leaders because of their same age instead of learning from an adult.”



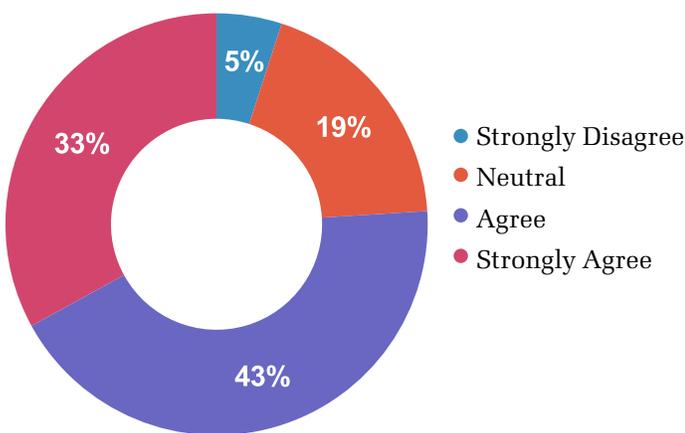
Youth leaders interacting with City Staff at the Leach Botanical Garden

involvement opportunities. An evaluation and two focus groups were conducted after the completion of the training (Figure 1). Some of the highlights are:

Youth Engagement and Participation

33 percent of the participants strongly agreed that their participation and engagement improved team building, civic involvement and leadership skills. 76 percent of the participants reported that the program improved their communication skills and ability to work in a team, while 19 percent were neutral, and 5 percent found the program of limited use.

Figure 1
Team Building and Communication Skills



In assessing the impact of the training, one of the youth leaders noted that:

“we learned from the leaders (professional instructors from BES) and we were able to pass what we learned to others. This helped us build our confidence to facilitate the training and improve public speaking.” Another youth participant observed that “having a youth leader was more fun and easier to understand because we have the same level of vocabulary, but having an adult in there would make things calm when things get messy.”

Socio-Economic Integration: Entrepreneurship 101 Training

One of the main themes shared at the community visioning session organized by DMA was the need for the newcomer immigrant and refugee community to understand the basics of starting a small business. Because the existing approach of delivering business development curriculum is mainstream focused, it created challenges for newcomer and non-native English speakers to fully grasp the content. The organization used a community-based participatory approach to create a culturally specific curriculum and delivered the training in the newcomer community member’s language.

The “Entrepreneurship 101: Educate, Empower and Emerge” training mobilized cultural liaisons from the Bhutanese, Latinx, and Myanmar communities. The liaisons attended the training offered by other non-profit partners and modified the curriculum to meet the needs of the newcomer immigrants and refugee participants. Liaisons recruited, conducted outreach, and helped co-facilitate the six-week workshop. The workshop provided key information on business insurance, administrative and legal processes, and access to capital and loans. On the last day of workshop, each community member presented their business ideas using a business canvas model and got inspired by hearing stories from small business leaders/owners from their own community/language group. Some of these participants had started small businesses either in their home country or refugee camp. This workshop has been helpful in transferring their traditional en-

trepreneurship skills and learning to adapt to the requirement of establishing businesses in the United States.

One of the participants shared her thoughts:

“Before joining, Ana had already had a little bit of knowledge and some experience with starting a business because her boyfriend currently has a transportation business. However, she also wants to start her own transportation business so she can be more independent. Her boyfriend transports shoes for the store Famous Footwear, picking them up in Hillsboro, Oregon and transporting them to Walla Walla, Washington which is about six hours away. Though her boyfriend has oriented her and has taught her some beneficial information, she believes that this workshop provided her with the clarity on the next steps she needs to take and she made sure to ask questions that would help resolve her confusion on some financial related things. Ana enjoyed the guest speakers, especially noting information she gained from the insurance company and the bank credit union which went into more depth about how to build a good credit score and she also appreciated guest speakers who answered her questions in a clear and understanding way.”

All of the above cases and examples affirm that if newcomer communities are engaged in ways that help them to thrive and if programs, services and resources are delivered in culturally specific ways, these communities can experience a positive integration process in their host societies. They can feel a sense of belonging, an opportunity to lead, and a chance to be part of the process. Building on the ten assets of culturally specific services by Curry Stevens, Delony and Morton (2019), and drawing from the above examples, we can infer that providing newcomer communities an opportunity to display and sell their traditional food through the Taste of Nations fostered

“inclusivity as opposed to outsider status,” “relationship, respect and recognition,” “integration with the community served,” and improved social and economic capital.

Youth Environmental Leadership programs and the Entrepreneurship 101 workshop helped build “advocacy,” “Sidestepping Imperial Roles and Relationships,” “Having a Tied Future,” and “Building Social and Economic Capital.”

4. “Two-Way” Process of Integration

The multidimensional approach of integration allows both newcomer and host society members to interact and create opportunities for intergroup dialogues through the sharing of culture, food and tradition, the enhancement of social cultural capital, and the development of cultural humility. This section highlights some of the experiences shared by members of the host society based on their interactions with newcomer communities.

a. Understanding newcomer communities need to retain their socio-cultural identity

In the process of adjusting to a new life in their host communities, newcomer communities often feel isolated due to language barriers, cultural shock, and failure to understand administrative processes. In this process, newcomer communities strive to build relationships with host societies or their own ethnic network while they retain their social and cultural identity. As Adam Kohl, director at Outgrowing Hunger observed: “They (newcomer groups) want that sense of belonging and the ability to stabilize, have some control or some influence in their life. The community gardening experiences have been helpful to them; they are able to grow foods from their culture.” He calls this new form of identity a “hybrid identity,” and he feels more comfortable interacting with newcomers.

b. Giving Back to the Community: Host Members’ Role in Building Foundation and Co-Creating Solutions

While developing a strong sense of belonging can help newcomer communities build a strong foundation, host society members’ role in creating these spaces is instrumental. Anne Downing, an ESL teacher at David Douglas High School and a non-profit chair who has been playing that role outside of her classroom time

through organizing and engaging youth in tree planting and world cup soccer, reflected:

“When I watch them practicing soccer or planting trees, I feel they are the having the best time building community within their teams. Most of the teams are mixed and not just one nationality. They make friends with other youth who they would have ignored at school. Now they have new friends. I can see a sense of pride as they feel their participation in a city sponsored tournament brings a lot of appreciation to them and their family.”

The process of a host member’s effort to create spaces and opportunity to help newcomer communities feel a sense of belonging has also helped host members build cultural humility, empathy, and better understanding of newcomer communities. Anne shares that her visits to students’ homes and interactions with their parents, aunts, and uncles helped create relations of trust with her students. Sharing a cup of tea was not only part of tasting a new flavor but building strong bonds by accepting and acknowledging each other’s identity.

Similarly, Patrik McDade, founder and the program director of People-Places-Things, recalled his teaching experience at the VOZ day labor center, especially during the pandemic. The need of learning technology has changed priorities among the immigrants.

Patrick McDade observed:

“Before the pandemic their priorities were their children, money and learning technology. Now with the pandemic this has changed, and their kids and money are now dependent on technology. We have been helping them learn Zoom while learning English and this has helped them to interact with others and get things done.”

All of these experiences show that integration requires both parties (newcomer and host members) to make an effort, learn from each other, respect and acknowledge

each other’s identity, and find some basic understanding to build relationships and develop a tied future. The combination of each these interactions has helped create social and cultural capital and moves us one step forward toward a more cohesive society.

Conclusion

One of the most important features of newcomer integration is to fully embrace the multicultural aspects of identity and to view them from a strength-based approach.

The value of immigrants and refugees’ lived experience, social and cultural capital, traditional skills, and resilient power offers clear benefits to host societies. The rich intergroup dialogue and interaction between these groups can serve not only as a humbling experience for host members but also as an opportunity to create a sense of belonging for newcomer groups. Often, programs, policies, and resources are designed from a “one size fits all” perspective; however, this monolithic approach can create dependency and stress within the newcomer communities. This can also negatively impact their level of confidence and prevent them from fulfilling their potential. When newcomer communities do not feel they belong to society, they become isolated, and interaction between them and host members may not help build relationship and trust. Rather, a perceived lack of belonging can create mistrust and power over instead of a sense of connection and relationship. Therefore, integration must function as a two-way process based on adopting culturally specific strategies where newcomers are part of designing and co-creating policies and practices that respect their heritage and effectively meet their needs.



Teacher Anne Downing on far right in orange hat with youth planting trees

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Conclusion

In February 2018, U. S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), the federal agency charged with granting citizenship requests and determining benefits under the immigration system, deleted the phrase “nation of immigrants” from its mission statement. This move, which generated considerable public outcry, was widely condemned for its symbolic rejection of the U. S.’s cherished image as a beacon of hope for people from other lands seeking greater security, opportunity, and freedom in a more welcoming environment.

In its previous mission statement before the 2018 revision, USCIS saluted the role that immigrants play in “securing America’s promise.” The phrase “nation of immigrants” epitomizes this view, celebrating the U. S. as a hospitable country that embraces newcomers and values their contributions to our social well-being. However, this rhetoric, which reflects the U. S.’s most inclusionary impulses, can also obscure the profound ambivalence and even hostility that has often marked social views on immigration throughout our history. As we acknowledge this troubled history and resist romantic or triumphal notions that the U. S. has unhesitatingly welcomed successive generations of immigrants and refugees, we echo the writer Yasmin Kahn’s observation that “migration is an essential part of being human” and endorse integrative efforts undertaken by public and private entities like those we have outlined in this report. We also believe that immigrants and refugees are helping Oregon fulfill its promise as a twenty-first century state and hope that our analysis has captured immigrant adaptation and agency in its many forms and manifestations.

As this report goes to press, we note the Oregon legislature’s passage of Senate Bill 778 establishing an Office of Immigrant and Refugee Advancement in the governor’s office. The new office would collect data and monitor progress related to immigrant and refugee integration, address social, economic, and health disparities, and collaborate with statewide and community-based organizations to promote an intentional immigrant and refugee strategy for Oregon.

State Senator Kayse Jama, a former refugee from Somalia and long-time community organizer who is a chief sponsor of SB 778, explained the broader implications of the legislation: “The establishment of this office would send a clear message that not only are the cultural and financial contributions of immigrant and refugee Oregonians valued but as a people and a community they are valued and included.” State Representative Khanh Pham, another co-sponsor of the legislation, explained both the personal and social implications of the bill’s passage: “I think it’s important to mark this moment in the story of Oregon. A story of a Muslim Somali former refugee in the Senate, and a daughter of Vietnamese refugees in the House, both the first of their kind, carrying a bill that creates an agency that serves people like our families, amidst a year that has seen hate increase in our community, and attacks on the very foundation of this capital of democracy. This moment is one built on love, of labor, of those who came before us, who survived so that future generations can thrive.”¹

As Senator Jama and Representative Pham suggest, having an Office of Immigrant and Refugee Advancement based in the governor’s office would affirm Oregon’s identity as a state of immigrants and refugees, signal its dedication to promoting full inclusion and acceptance for all newcomers, and encourage community-based efforts to advance the integration process. Creating this office at the highest level of state government may also produce a ripple effect, prompting other institutions, organizations, and even communities to take similar action. We offer this report in a similar spirit and look forward to purposeful conversation and concerted action that makes a “statewide immigrant and refugee strategy” both an unwavering commitment and an enduring aspiration for Oregon to pursue.

1 Sam Stites, “Oregon lawmakers approve creation of new office to support immigrants and refugees,” Oregon Public Broadcasting, June 23, 2021, <https://www.opb.org/article/2021/06/23/oregon-lawmakers-approve-creation-of-new-office-to-support-immigrants-refugees>



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