



Accelerating Justice for Pacific Islanders: Meyer Memorial Trust Pacific Islander Engagement Synthesis

Overview

Meyer Memorial Trust's (Meyer) new mission is to accelerate racial, social and economic justice for the collective well-being of Oregon's lands and peoples. To live into this mission, Meyer is adopting a new way of grantmaking that centers community perspectives in decision making. Meyer knows that to move from equity to justice, they need community guidance and leadership to ensure the priorities of Pacific Islander communities are reflected in how they carry out their work going forward.

Through this effort, Meyer Memorial Trust partnered with Alyshia Alohalani Macaysa-Feracota to host two Pacific Islander engagement sessions with community leaders, as well as three 1:1 conversations in September 2022. Meyer hosted these conversations to begin or deepen relationships with Pacific Islander community leaders by:

1. Recognizing the structural oppression and systemic erasure experienced by Pacific Islander communities in Oregon
2. Ensuring that the priorities and strengths of Pacific Islander communities are reflected in Meyer's new framework and grantmaking structure.

What was shared in these conversations will help shape Meyer's future funding priorities throughout Oregon. The conversations focused on three central questions listed below.

1. What does Meyer need to know about PI communities if it is to accelerate justice for PI communities?
2. What is the current (and desired) state of PI movements and organizations already doing this work?
3. What needs to change at an institutional or systemic level for PI communities & organizations to be at the forefront of justice work?

This report serves as a synthesis of the stories and experiences shared during the Pacific Islander engagement sessions.

Whose voices are in these stories?

Ethnographic Region	Community of Focus	Areas Served	Organization	Representative
Micronesia	Micronesians, COFA citizens	Based in: Washington and Clackamas County Serves: Benton, Clackamas, Deschutes, Marion, Multnomah, Union, Washington	Living Islands	Kianna Juda Angelo
Micronesia	Micronesians, COFA citizens	Based in: Marion County Serves: Benton, Clackamas, Marion, Multnomah, Polk, Union, Washington	MIC	Jackie Leung
Micronesia	Marshallese, COFA Citizens	Based in: Marion County Serves: Benton, Clackamas, Marion, Multnomah, Polk, Union, Washington	OMCA	Jesse Gasper
Micronesia/ Oceania	Palauans, Queer and Trans Pls	RB: Multnomah County based OPIC: Multnomah County based, statewide serving UTOPIA PDX: see below	OPIC / Rengelekel Belau / UTOPIA PDX	Virginia Luka
Oceania	Queer and Trans Pls	Based in: Multnomah County Serves: Clackamas, Jackson, Multnomah, Wasco, Washington	UTOPIA PDX	Kaina Scott Barba
Polynesia	Kānaka maoli, Samoan	-	-	Ku’ulei Wong
Polynesia	Samoan	Based in: Multnomah County Serves: Jackson, Multnomah, Wasco	SPDC	Jacinta Galea’i
Polynesia	Kānaka maoli	Based in: Washington County Serves: Clackamas, Clatsop, Marion, Multnomah, Washington	KALO HCC	Leialoha Ka’ula
Polynesia	Tongans	Based in: Washington County Serves: Washington, Multnomah	Le’o ‘o e OFA	Sisilia Afemui

This information is organized in alphabetical order by ethnographic region, then by the first name of the individual representative. While there are limited “areas served” listed for each organization, it is important to note that all organizations are open to serving Pacific Islanders across all counties in Oregon. Throughout this report, these individuals will be referenced as ‘community leaders.’ It is critical to note that no Melanesians were engaged in this process.

What does Meyer need to know about Pacific Islanders to accelerate justice for PI communities?

It is critical to understand the systemic erasure of the Pacific Islander diaspora in Oregon.

Through data and research practices rooted in white supremacy culture, such as use of aggregate data categories like “Asian Pacific Islander” or the evolution of U.S. census categories (i.e., Hawaiian → Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islanders), the Pacific Islander experience has been oversimplified and overlooked. This has resulted in negative impacts at all levels (systemic, institutional, organizational, community, and individual).

For example, Meyer Memorial Trust awarded \$2,629,500.00 to “Asian Pacific Islander” organizations between July 2015 - November 2021. It is critical to note that of the 8 organizations funded, **0** are Pacific Islander led. In fact, as of October 2022, there is currently a total of **1** Pacific Islander staff and **0** Pacific Islanders in a leadership position across the two largest “API” awardees.¹

Community leaders argue that this is a trend across the continent, and has resulted in unjust health and life outcomes for Pacific Islanders. Community leaders named the importance of culturally specific services and movements led by and for Pacific Islanders. It is important for Pacific Islanders to receive support from organizations who understand how to navigate services unique to their citizenship statuses, and deliver these services in ways that reflect their specific cultural values and lived experiences.

“It is critical to understand that NHPIs are distinct from Asian Americans, and these 2 groups were legally disaggregated during the Clinton administration. NHPI nations contain no Asian countries and do not share any unifying history with Asian nations. Thus, using the antiquated term “Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders” (or “AAPI”) obscures the health disparities and oppression specific to the NHPI experience. When disaggregated, Native Hawaiians have shorter life spans and higher incidence of diabetes, asthma, substance abuse, and obesity compared with all major Asian American ethnic groups.” -Kekoa Taparra

“I am tired of being an afterthought, too many times we are invited to join an event or project late because someone pointed out there isn't [a] PI presence.” -PI Engagement Participant

Pacific Islanders are not a monolith. Pacific Islander, Oceania, and the three ethnographic regions are ethnic/racial terms placed on a diverse set of indigenous people with different cultures by foreigners.

Oceania is a geographic region in the Pacific Ocean that includes three ethnographic regions: Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia. Pacific Islanders (PI) are indigenous to Oceania, “representing approximately 30 Pacific nations and more than 20,000 islands. NHPIs are deeply rooted in their shared languages, traditions, and heritage of Oceania voyaging.”²

While migration to the continent has largely been through the military, higher education, and church, community leaders said that each Pacific Islander community and nation have different relationships with the

¹ AANHPI Applications and Awards since July 2015, Meyer Memorial Trust

² Pacific Islanders Searching for Inclusion in Medicine, Kekoa Taparra

U.S, which also means different experiences of colonization, trauma, and cultural assimilation. There are a number of political statuses for Pacific Island nations such as: illegally annexed state (i.e., The Kingdom of Hawai'i), US unincorporated territory (i.e., Guåhan, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, American Samoa, etc.), [COFA nations](#) (Compact of Free Association), or unaffiliated sovereign countries (i.e., The Kingdom of Tonga). This results in varying citizenship statuses for Pacific Islander diaspora living on the continent: forced US citizens, US citizens, undocumented, COFA citizen, US national, etc. This means that within the PI community, individuals have different resources and privileges living in the US that drive disparate outcomes within the Pacific Islander community.

For example: COFA Citizens are from the Federated States of Micronesia, The Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau. COFA Citizens are Micronesian, but not all Micronesian nations are COFA nations. COFA Citizens can freely travel, live, and work in the US but have limited access to power and resources critical to a healthy, thriving life. COFA Citizens do not have the ability to vote, could not apply for FEMA funded COVID-19 response support, and only recently got their access to medicaid restored (2020). This system of disinvestment created grave consequences for Micronesians when it came to COVID-19.

Community leaders cited how it is typical for those who know little about Pacific Islanders to use Hawaiians, Native Hawaiians, and Polynesians as synonymous with Pacific Islander. This definition of Pacific Islander is not only incomplete and inaccurate, but harmful. The overgeneralization of Pacific Islanders as a monolithic group has invisibilized experiences like the one noted above, and caused rifts within the Pacific Islander community. This is due to the cultural erasure and scarcity of resources driven by colonization, capitalism, and white supremacy.

Pacific Islanders' connection to land and to one another is profound. Understanding these connections and the way they are organized is key to meeting the communities' many needs.

Pacific Islander communities are networked in different ways when it comes to sharing and providing resources. Some communities are organized through the church, this includes, but is not limited to: the Tongan communities' connection to the Mormon church, or the Chuukese communities' connection to Christian churches. Through church networks, community members are connected to key resources like housing, food, individuals to support with interpretation, or key leaders in general who are savvy at navigating service systems.

Some communities are organized through cultural practices and centers, such as hula hālaus for Kānaka maoli. The hālaus are centers of history, cultural preservation and practice. Through the deep community formed at hālaus, these centers also play an important role in connecting trusted leaders and resources with community members in need.

There are also Pacific Islanders who have left home because of the persecution, transmisia, and queermisia perpetuated by the colonization of their home islands. Because of this, Queer and Trans Pacific Islanders in the

diaspora may not always feel welcome in general Pacific Islander community spaces. They often organize their own spaces of healing and resource sharing.

Community leaders also named that along with Queer and Trans Pacific Islanders, elders and youth are some of the most vulnerable community members. Some of the concerns for these groups include: the revered status elders hold in many PI communities, elders as some of the last standing cultural practitioners from specific islands, the economic oppression of elders, and the disability status of elders. For youth they named concerns about: the responsibility placed on youth to navigate and interpret services for their families, the economic expectations placed on youth to be income earners to support their families, and first generation youth's disconnect from land and culture.

While many Pacific Islander organizations in Oregon are considered to be “new,” “young,” or “small” in the ‘formal’ Western sense, community service for Pacific Islanders is not new. It is heavily embedded into the everyday experience of Pacific Islander communities, where collectivism and responsibility run deep. For example: Rengelkel Belay has served Oregon's Palauan community for over 30 years. Their annual Palauan President's Day summer festival attracts Palauans from across the region (Washington, Oregon, and California). The event holds great significance for the Palauan community that garners the attendance of the Republic of Palau's President or Vice President.

There is a long history of colonial forces stripping Pacific Islanders of their cultures by banning indigenous language, arts, and other cultural practices. As Pacific Islanders in Oregon continue to organize for visibility, self determination, and healing, community leaders noted that the community is in the process of learning what it means to decolonize and indigenize.

Healthy and thriving Pacific Islander communities

Accelerating justice for Pacific Islanders in Oregon means supporting the community's vision of health. To community leaders, a healthy and thriving community looks like:

1. **A society where Pacific Islander cultural practices are at the forefront for Pacific Islanders** - rather than being in spaces that force you to assimilate or downplay your culture, PIs need environments and spaces that celebrate Pacific Islander identities and teach Pacific Islander culture
2. **Access to quality education** - inclusion in Western education systems, education across the lifespan, and indigenous systems of education dedicated to cultural preservation
3. **Livable and stable wages** - permanent jobs with benefits that pay a livable wage and provide the opportunity to advance, career opportunities post-high school that do not solely focus on higher education
4. **Accessible homeownership for multi-generational and multi-family households** - ability to become homeowners without barriers related to citizenship status (i.e., COFA Citizens are limited in homeownership opportunities), economic justice for Pacific Islanders to gain financial stability that allows for qualifying for a mortgage

5. **Culturally responsive mental health** - supporting people to address the shame or guilt they feel (for things such as: shame around needing resources), addressing historical and contemporary trauma, etc.
6. **Systems that serve in diverse Pacific Islander languages with integrity** - including equitable pay and stable work for language experts, training and support for language experts to get their certifications and be properly integrated into service systems, training and support for language experts in the subject matter they are expected to translate
7. **Immigration support** - accessible and respectable resources that support Pacific Islanders in obtaining US citizenship or navigating the limitations and opportunities within certain citizenship statuses

What is the current (and desired) state of PI movements and organizations already doing this work?

The information below is not meant to be a comprehensive overview of each organization’s current and desired areas of work, but rather a summary of what was shared during the PI engagement sessions. It is also important to note that not all programs or services under current areas of work are funded. Many of these programs are currently powered by grassroots community organizing efforts.

Organization	What work is your organization currently doing?	If funding was not a barrier, what kind of work would you do?
KALO HCC	Areas: culture, education, health, preserving Kānaka maoli culture as stewards of land Example: taro patch community garden project	Same as current areas of work.
Le’o ‘o e OFA	Areas: youth, immigration, language interpretation, navigating court system Example: Back to School Drive, accompanying community members to court hearings for petty crimes	Would transition to have full-time staff, education and career planning that is inclusive of vocational school options, financial education and homeownership programs
Living Islands	Areas: Climate change, culturally responsive food, technology and media, education and awareness Example: medical missions in the Pacific, bridging international diplomatic work with CBO work on the continent	Programs: Cross-cultural Education, Community Resilience and Recovery, Food Justice, Social Justice Awareness, Criminal Justice and Mitigation for NHPI Youth, Public Education and Awareness about NHPI, Pacific Islander Center, Emergency preparedness, disaster relief. Capacity: Permanent staff, Offices.
MIC	Areas: CHW training hub, CHW chronic disease programming, health insurance access, back to school resource fair, housing, sexual assault, domestic violence, language interpretation	Cultural service center that includes housing, MIC offices, and is a one stop shop for resources

	Example: Micronesian Islander Community Celebration, CHW training	
OMCA	<i>Was not able to participate in this section</i>	<i>Was not able to participate in this section</i>
OPIC	Areas: decolonizing data, PI capacity building, education Example: Pacific Islander Data Modernization project with Oregon Public Health Division	Sustainable funding for full time staff, community centered data systems, systems change in healthcare and housing
Rengelekel Belau	Areas: updating charter, bylaws, and 501(c)(c) status Example: Palauan President's Day summer festival	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Host annual access to higher education conference for students and their families - Create a mentoring program between Palauan youth and elders - Create a Palauan cultural education program to teach Palauan culture, language, art and histories with a focus on decolonization, liberation, and healing - Sponsor beach clean ups with Oregon coastal communities - Partner with Oregon Food Bank to support community gardening
SPDC	Areas: COVID-19 relief, resource referrals, education, community assessments (housing, health, education), tobacco prevention Example: Pacific Islander student programming at Roosevelt High School, Samoan Fest in partnership with Samoan faith leaders	Expanding access to current programming and services
UTOPIA PDX	Areas: rental assistance, food access, COVID-19 vaccination and testing Example: COVID-19 vaccination clinics, COVID-19 public health informational campaigns	Sustainable funding for full time staff, transition back to focusing on healing for QTPIs (especially elders and youth), support QTPI leadership development

Universal needs across community leaders and organizations included:

1. Funding for full-time staff to help properly sustain programs and services provided
2. Funding for full-time staff to help set up and maintain organizational operations
3. Capacity building and mentorship to strengthen business operations of organizations
4. Leadership development to support PIs in representing the community in key spaces of influence across the State

What needs to change at an institutional or systemic level for PI communities & organizations to be at the forefront of justice work?

PI communities need good partners who will take the time to build relationships with the different communities, and learn about the various histories and cultures. The onus is typically on the community to go to funders and partners, rather than funders and partners joining and supporting community events and spaces. Partners should also recognize their need for training and education on PI cultural competency (especially decision-makers and trustees). It is not just the community who has something to learn.

PI leaders would like the opportunity to build a more collaborative partnership with Meyer Memorial Trust through consistent check-ins, rather than the typical power imbalanced relationship we see between funders and grantees that are only facilitated by grant cycles.

Partners need to provide and secure funding specific to the PI community, and the community needs to have the power to determine the best use of the funds. This requires trusting that PI organizations know what is best for their communities, and providing capacity building support to ensure that PI organizations are successful during their grant periods. This also includes shifting timelines and deliverables to mirror PI cultural pedagogy, rather than Western ones. Decolonizing and healing cannot be measured in a short funding cycle.

Pacific Islanders need to be part of the staff and leadership of partner organizations, and be given the support, resources, and ability to serve the PI community in that capacity. PIs are rarely represented in the staff of non-PI focused organizations. When PIs are working at partner organizations they often do not have a decision-making role, or are in a role that does not allow them to prioritize the Pacific Islander community in their work plan.

Do not count COVID-19 funds that came from the State or Federal government as part of an organization's budget. These are typically one-time funding opportunities where a majority of the resources were delivered back out of the community. An insignificant portion of these funds were utilized for staff time or organizational capacity. This funding inflates the actual operating budget of organizations. Instead, it better reflects the massive amount of community need with very little institutional support that community leaders have had to address during a global pandemic.

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