

Housing Opportunities Design Process

Highlights of Stakeholder Engagement



HOUSING
OPPORTUNITIES

Prepared by Kristina Smock Consulting
September 2015

Highlights from Stakeholder Engagement

Introduction

Meyer Memorial Trust gathered input from hundreds of stakeholders across Oregon on the scope and framing of the Housing Portfolio. More than 335 stakeholders representing all of Oregon's counties responded to an online survey. Dozens of issue experts then participated in a series of listening sessions and individual interviews to provide more in-depth input on key questions. This document summarizes the ideas and priorities that emerged from this stakeholder engagement process.

Oregon's Affordable Housing Landscape

The survey asked about the greatest challenges, disparities, and needs in Oregon's affordable housing arena. The most common themes were:

- The lack of affordable housing for low-income residents across the state;
- Insufficient resources for affordable housing development, particularly in rural areas;
- Inadequate support services to help residents stabilize in their housing and improve their outcomes;
- Need for modifications to the existing affordable housing development and financing models;
- Gentrification and displacement;
- Lack of affordable homeownership opportunities;
- Need for policy reform and systems change;
- Disparities in access to opportunity; and
- Housing discrimination and other barriers that make it difficult for some low-income residents to access affordable housing.

The survey asked about the most strategic leverage points and the best role for philanthropy and Meyer in addressing Oregon's affordable housing needs. The most common themes were:

- Support policy and systems change;
- Provide capital for affordable housing development and preservation;
- Fund supportive services and better integration of housing with services;
- Increase public and private resources for affordable housing;
- Increase coordination and systems alignment between housing and other sectors;
- Serve as a convener, catalyst, and opinion leader; and
- Support advocacy and organizing.

Scope of the Housing Portfolio

Stakeholders were asked which of the housing related programs and services that Meyer has funded in the past should be prioritized within the Housing Portfolio. The top priorities were:

- Affordable rental housing, which was by far the highest priority;
- Supportive services to help people connect to housing opportunities, retain their housing, and improve their lives;
- Strategies that connect people experiencing homelessness with permanent housing; and
- Homeownership strategies that advance the portfolio's equity goals.

Stakeholders generally agreed that the portfolio should prioritize housing for households at or below 60% of Median Family Income (MFI), with some emphasis given to the needs of people at or below 30% MFI. Many suggested that the portfolio should also include flexibility to fund projects up to 80% MFI to capture strategic opportunities for mixed income projects and for workforce housing targeted at workers at the lower end of the income spectrum.

Funding Approach

Stakeholders encouraged Meyer to develop a framework for the portfolio that defines clear priorities and a strategic direction but leaves room for flexibility and is open to ideas and innovation from the field. They noted the value of being thoughtful and strategic in allocating Meyer's investments, but also stressed that organizations have wide-ranging needs and that the funding opportunities shouldn't be overly prescriptive.

The Affordable Housing Initiative (AHI) will continue to focus on directed strategies guided by the FY15-19 AHI framework. Stakeholders said that the rest of the portfolio's funding strategies should complement and enhance the AHI through grants and investments that support the following principles:

- Catalyze innovation and change in Oregon's affordable housing arena by piloting new models and promoting policy and systems change;
- Move the dial on Oregon's housing crisis by identifying the key leverage points where Meyer's funding will make the greatest difference;
- Put people first, always keeping in mind the ultimate goal of affordable housing, which is to provide low-income Oregonians with stability and access to opportunity;
- Promote alignment and coordination across the various sectors and service systems that impact the lives of low-income Oregonians; and
- Support a continuum of housing options that reflect the diversity of Oregon's communities and meet the needs of people where they are.

Investment Priorities

Meyer's past housing investments have supported a wide range of different approaches to Oregon's affordable housing needs. The stakeholder engagement process provided input into

which types of investments – in addition to those already in the AHI framework – should be prioritized going forward:

- Policy and systems change, including funding for advocacy, organizing, and cross-sector alignment;
- Capital for affordable housing development and preservation, with a focus on pre-development funding, permanent gap financing, and working capital;
- Supportive services to help low-income Oregonians access available housing opportunities, retain their housing, and build a better life; and
- Capacity building and flexible operating support, with a particular focus on smaller rural and culturally-specific organizations as well as organizations and networks that are valuable to the field as a whole.

Equity Lens

Stakeholders affirmed that the portfolio investments should be framed within an overarching equity lens. The equity lens that guides the AHI targets funding to under-resourced populations and organizations including communities of color, culturally-specific organizations, and underserved rural communities. Some stakeholders encouraged Meyer to broaden the framing of the equity lens for the portfolio to include housing for other vulnerable populations such as persons with disabilities and domestic violence survivors.

Stakeholders offered a range of suggestions for how to operationalize the equity lens through the portfolio. The most frequent suggestions were:

- Target investments to underserved and disparately impacted communities;
- Build the capacity and leadership of underserved communities;
- Engage members of underserved communities in decision-making; and
- Invest in strategies to address equity-related housing issues such as gentrification and displacement, housing discrimination, screening barriers, minority contracting, and disparities in access to opportunity.

Beyond Grantmaking

Stakeholders urged Meyer Trust to maximize the impact of its investments by playing an active role in the affordable housing field by:

- Serving as a convener;
- Working to leverage additional investments from local and national funders and investors;
- Helping to inform public opinion and promote policy change;
- Sponsoring research and data collection to support the field; and
- Promoting shared learning among grantees and stakeholders.