

GARE'S IMPLEMENTATION AND INNOVATION FUND

Submitted by Multnomah County Office of Diversity and Equity

1. DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT, OUTCOMES AND RESULTS

The Multnomah Youth Commission (MYC), the official youth policy body for the City of Portland and Multnomah County, Oregon, in collaboration with its project partner, Word is Bond, requests funding to support community-based research to focus their implementation efforts for the county's [*OJJDP Strategic Plan to Address Gang Violence*](#), Strategy 6: "Links between Police, Youth and Communities. While the plan outlines potential approaches and has the support of the region's law enforcement partners, it does not adequately reflect the needs, perspectives, and barriers faced by youth of color disproportionately impacted by police violence, considerations critical to the goal's long-term success.

The Youth Against Violence (YAV), a subcommittee of the MYC, have laid the groundwork for this effort. YAV has hosted three Youth Against Violence summits since 2011, which served to highlight the reality that, for youth of color, negative police interactions are a life-and-death situation, a power dynamic with real-life consequences. The project partner, Word is Bond (WIB) is a new non-profit whose mission is to build positive relationships between young Black men and law enforcement. The Local Public Safety Coordinating Council tapped both organizations to lead a joint-effort to address Strategy 6. Together, YAV and WIB youth learned Youth Participatory Action Research techniques through on-going training supported by WIB as well as staff and other supporters from throughout Multnomah County. With these skills in place, the youth are ready to fully implement their vision of partnering with youth-serving community-based providers, organizations and schools to conduct a series of at least 12 focus groups, involving at least 200 youth, to help create a responsive, collaborative, and effective approach to creating links between youth of color and local law enforcement.

Overall Project Goal: Learn what youth, particularly youth of color, in the community need to build relationships and encourage better interactions between law enforcement and youth of color and integrate their voice into Multnomah County's Strategic Plan to Address Gang Violence.

Research Question: What are the problems experienced between youth and police and what can be done to make the relationships better?

Target Audience: At least 200 middle- to low-income youth between the ages of 8-25 living in Multnomah County that identify with the following: Black, Latino, API, Native American, Multiracial.

Specific outcomes:

- Engage youth of color from community-based partners in creating positive change
- Gain an in-depth understanding of youth attitudes and experiences towards law enforcement in Multnomah County
- Prioritize strategies for youth and police engagement methods
- Improve relationships for youth and police in the community
- Create recommendations for law enforcement agencies that will positively benefit youth when engaging with officers

2. HOW THE PROJECT WILL IMPACT STRUCTURAL RACISM

YAV and WIB have created this partnership to stand against all forms of oppression, most importantly racism and ageism, the two forms of oppression that affect the group members and peer communities the most. To that end, WIB and YAV created five areas of engagement to work to dismantle racism and push back against ageism: creating safe spaces to facilitate dialogue and interaction; training and education for youth and police; trauma; community engagement; fun. These strategies are embedded in the planned approach to enhancing linkages between police, youth and communities.

YAV and WIB recognize that years of systemic racism within the legal system and police policies that unfairly targeted youth of color have resulted in fear and stigma towards police. WIB and YAV recognize that for

meaningful dialogue to happen, it needs to be in spaces that are safe and culturally affirming to all participants. This means having the conversations in communities where participants live, rather than spaces that favor law enforcement such as police precincts, court houses or buildings far from public transportation and or youth communities.

Ultimately, through implementation of the five sub-strategies that make up Strategy 6 of the Strategic Plan, youth will be empowered to engage with police in ways that go beyond the individual interactions and address the deeper and more challenging issues of structural racism. By focusing on both personal interaction and supporting policy that challenges existing structures, YAV and WIB is committed to a strategy that dismantles systems of oppression and creates an environment based around mutual understanding, education and respect. Too often youth are not invited, intentionally included, nor authentically engaged at policy decision making tables, despite the fact that they, more than anyone, face the long-term impacts of policies that support and sustain structural racism.

Successfully implemented, activities strengthening linkages between youth and law enforcement (Strategy 6) will ensure youth are ‘at the table’ by creating a safe space for WIB and MYC youth to directly engage with criminal justice system partners who represent institutions of power that have historically and systematically engaged in patterns of exclusion by creating inequities in laws, policies and practices that perpetuate inequities for youth of color and their families. Ultimately, this project weaves together Youth-Adult Partnership, Positive Youth Development, Restorative Justice models and practices to create change and shift how government bodies/representatives engage with communities most impacted by the structures and systems that perpetuate inequitable outcomes.

This critical work, however, cannot be not done in a vacuum: it requires youth to be accepted as full partners despite the vast power differential between adult institutions and the youth themselves. The proposed focus groups are designed to provide MYC and WIB youth the support, information and authority to speak a truth that reflects the shared experiences of the broader youth community in subsequent activities with law enforcement. The resulting rich exchange of perspectives, experiences, and strengths has the potential to impact structural racism across institutions and empower youth as well as law enforcement partners to identify and address other forms of structural racism encountered in their lives.

3. HOW PROJECT CENTERS THE EXPERIENCE AND LEADERSHIP OF COMMUNITIES

This project centers on the experiences and leadership within communities of color, which have been disparately impacted by structural racism in two ways:

- a) This work is led and driven by youth, primarily youth of color: all WIB youth identify as African-American males and 90% of YAV members identify as youth of color. While clearly the emerging leaders of tomorrow, youth have been ignored voices in the conversation about preventing and ending violence. This work is changing that. Adults from both MYC and WIB, 100% of whom are people of color, are available for support and training, but intentionally do not take over, instead using a Youth-Adult Partnership Model, where both youth and adults work together to move this work forward, contributing with their own experiences, while youth lead and drive the work. The strength of this approach is being fully and fiercely youth-led, a model that is unique and unparalleled locally. It has also created multiple opportunities for partnerships and support from throughout the city and county, of which this project is a prime example.
- b) In addition, the 200 youth participating in the focus groups, along with their adult mentors, will be empowered through this project, lending a voice to their experiences and providing new avenues for them to identify and address the structural racism they face every day.

4. PARTNERS AND ROLES

Focus Group Project Implementation Partners

Multnomah County Office of Diversity and Equity (ODE): The Multnomah Youth Commission is housed in the Multnomah County ODE, which will serve as fiscal lead for any award resulting from this application. ODE staff will supervise the proposed staff position and oversee all expenditures. In addition, ODE staff assigned to the MYC will be actively engaged in all aspects of the project.

City of Portland, Office of Neighborhood Involvement: (ONI): ONI partners with ODE to staff and support the MYC. Assigned ONI staff will be actively engaged in all aspects of the project.

Word is Bond: WIB is a local non-profit supported by Portland Opportunities Industrial Opportunities (POIC), Northwest Outward Bound and the Portland Police Bureau. WIB has fully participated in all planning for this project and will support WIB youth engaged in the focus groups.

Community-based partners and schools: a broad network of youth serving community partners and schools will host the planned focus groups, working with project staff and youth to schedule events and recruit interested youth.

Strategy 6 Partners, *involved in planning meetings and offering logistic support as necessary*: Local Public Safety Coordinating Council (LPSCC); Gresham Police Bureau; Portland Police Bureau, Youth Services Division; Multnomah County Sheriff's Office; Multnomah County District Attorney; Portland Office of Youth Violence Prevention.

5. PROJECT BUDGET

Requested funds, outlined below, will be paired with leveraged support from the partners outlined above.

Budget Detail:

- Program Aide: The program aide will provide logistical support to ensure smooth program operations by coordinating focus groups, survey outreach and scheduling interviews and supporting youth and staff as necessary (\$18/hour for 385 hours = \$6,930)
- Gift cards for youth participating in focus groups, surveys and interviews: (\$25 gift card / youth for 200 youth = \$7,500)
- Food for focus groups: (\$30/focus group at 12 sites = \$360)
- **Total request: \$14,790**

6. CONTACT INFORMATION FOR PROJECT LEAD

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7. INSTITUTIONAL AND COMMUNITY PARTNER REFERENCES

Partner Institutions

City of Portland Office of Youth Violence Prevention

Contact: Antoinette Edwards, Director, Antoinette.Edwards@portlandoregon.gov
(p) 503.823.3584

Local Public Safety Coordinating Council, Youth and Gang Violence Steering Committee

Contact: Lily Yamamoto, LPSCC Project Manager, (e) lily.yamamoto@multco.us; (p) 609.703.0197

Community Partners

Word is Bond

Contact: Lakayana Drury, Executive Director, (e) ldrury@portlandoic.org ; (p) 608.843.5259

Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO)

Contact: Isatou S. Barry, Youth Program Coordinator, (p) 503.740.3741