



Food Systems Ambassador Program Evaluation





Introduction

When the Seed to Supper Ambassador Program began in 2017, it was an effort to expand the Seed to Supper Program (a community-based workshop program centered around growing your own food) to communities that didn't speak English or Spanish. Over the last seven years the program has radically grown to include representation from all of Oregon Food Bank's priority equity constituencies. Oregon Food Bank adopted a new title for the program in 2023 – Food Systems Ambassador Program. The program's projects have been diverse

and varied, including Halal food distributions, immigrant rights trainings, delivering essential items to seasonal and farm working labor forces, nonprofit organizational development, student financial education, land restoration for First Food projects and voter registration events, just to name a few. We hope that this evaluation document acts as an inspiration to continue supporting these vibrant partnerships, or initiate new programming for your organization building on collaborations with the incredible leaders profiled here.

Goals of Evaluation

In 2024 the Community Food Systems Team at Oregon Food Bank (OFB) set out to better understand the impact and effectiveness of the Food Systems Ambassador Program in helping OFB's priority equity constituents to develop a more just food system. OFB defines its

priority equity constituencies as communities disproportionately impacted by hunger. This includes **Black, Indigenous and all People of Color, immigrants and refugees, gender expansive folks (including Two-Spirit folks), and single mothers and caregivers.**



Food Systems Ambassador Program Overview

The Food Systems Ambassador Program at Oregon Food Bank is a method of community organizing used to increase community food security among OFB's priority equity constituencies. The Food Systems Ambassador Program recruits leaders from OFB's priority equity constituencies who commit to 15 months of relationship building, networking and program development and implementation of community-driven food systems improvement projects. Ambassadors create projects that aim to improve their communities' food security, address root causes of hunger and create engagement opportunities for a more inclusive democracy.

Since the beginning of this program 5 years ago, it has responded to community needs by growing culturally familiar crops, engaging in advocacy, and mobilizing resources. Many Food Systems Ambassadors go on to engage with other departments in OFB by storytelling with our Community Philanthropy department or engaging their communities to become coalition members in our advocacy work around Food For All Oregonians. We do want to specifically call out the needs during pandemic response

when many grassroots-led community groups were granted funding to support mutual aid and food distribution. As these funding sources have diminished, organizations continue to see high need in their respective communities. In order to better meet the needs of Food Systems Ambassadors, staff pivoted the program to focus more on food distribution and fund-raising. The Ambassador to Partner Agency Pathway Cohort was established in 2023 to support ambassador-led organizations building up the capacity to sustain funding to run a permanent food distribution program. During the program's iteration, staff identified a gap in OFB's ability to support emerging nonprofits and ensure that community groups have access to the resources needed for fiscal sustainability and independence.

As we look towards the future, we know one thing to be certain: the program will continue to evolve and adapt to the needs of the community, and OFB staff will continue to be of support in identifying resources so that ambassadors and their organizations can reach their goals.



Food Systems Ambassador Project Examples

Ambassador-led programs include community gardening, food distribution, farm development, census engagement and more. Below are some examples of the work of Food Systems Ambassador Alumni.



Francisca Aparicio: Farmworker Support

Francisca Aparicio was a 2021–2022 Food System Ambassador. Francisca’s project was inspired by 2020 Ambassador Lourdez Estrada who began a program which provided basic needs kits for Latine families. Francisca adapted this program to serve the farmworker and agricultural worker communities in Marion, Polk and Linn counties. Through her participation in the program, she was introduced to Marion Polk Food Share (MPFS) staff and supported

18 months of communications and outreach to start a twice monthly food distribution for the farmworker community. In 2024, that mobile pantry was promoted to a 1A permanent pantry and renamed as the Tabernacle Food Pantry, a significant success for the community. Francisca also began a Community Farm Project, through which she funds and leads a group of volunteers to grow food on a homeowners garden plot. They grow crops that Spanish-speaking farmworkers desire but don’t grow or have access to on their farms of employment.



Hoiyee Cheung and Growing Ancestral Roots

Hoiyee Chung was a member of the 2022–2023 Food Systems Ambassador cohort. Hoiyee started the Corvallis-based organization Growing Ancestral Roots (GAR) out of a desire to increase support for BIPOC farming in her community. During her time in the Ambassador program, Hoiyee worked with OFB staff to navigate fiscal sponsorship and grant management, increase GAR’s ability to apply for grants, increase volunteer programming, increase GAR’s social media presence and provide resources and support for BIPOC growers in the Corvallis area. Hoiyee has gone on to participate in another Oregon Food Bank community organizing program called FEAST (Food, Education, Agriculture, Solutions, Together) with a team of other BIPOC leaders, which hosted a large community conversation and put together a series of cultural food-focused events to increase relationships between BIPOC communities in Corvallis. Under Hoiyee’s leadership, GAR continues to grow food, support BIPOC farmers in Linn and Benton counties and work towards a vision of an equity-focused local food system.

First Food Distribution with Ambassador Duane Lane

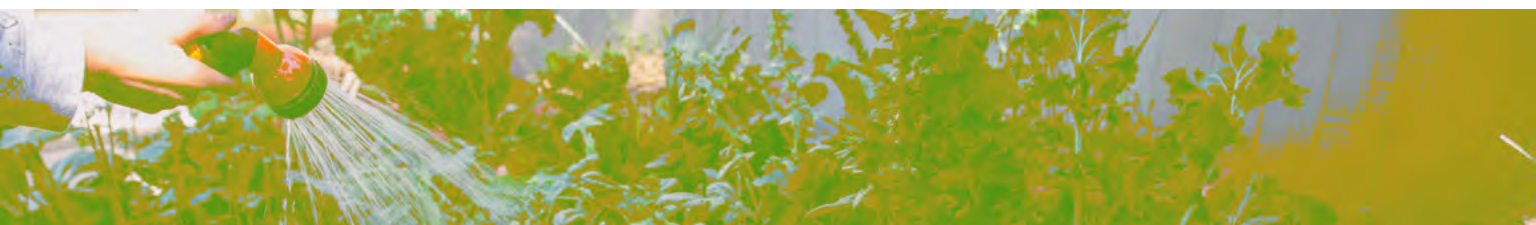
Duane Lane was a member of the 2023–2024 Food Systems Ambassador cohort. During his tenure in the program, Duane worked with native farmers and small businesses to purchase, aggregate and distribute first foods. Duane sourced foods such as canned salmon, dehydrated meals, honey, jam, camas, vegetables and more to supplement food boxes at Grand Ronde Portland and NAYA. Duane went on to receive a grant from the Oregon Food Bank to expand his distribution work through his farm business 1855 Plants. To learn more about Duane's work, [check out this video](#).



Community Gardening with Ambassador Maxi Hernandez Reyes

Maxi Hernandez Reyes was a member of the 2023–2024 Food Systems Ambassador cohort. In her time with the program, Maxi worked with local nonprofit Guerreras Latinas to lead a garden program for Latina women called Sembradoras.

Maxi taught her community how to cultivate their own food and grow culturally significant crops such as pipicha, papalo, verdolagas, chiles, tomatillos and more. In addition to this work, Maxi hosted food distribution events and began her own farm where she grows food for her local food bank. To learn more about Maxi's work [check out this video](#).





Somali Oregon Service Center (SOSC) Food Distribution

Representatives from the Somali Oregon Service Center (SOSC) participated in the 2022–2023 Food Systems Ambassador cohort. During their time in the program, SOSC started a twice monthly food distribution in partnership with

Rohingya Youth Association of Portland (RYAP). The organization utilizes funds to purchase Halal foods and other culturally significant foods for their clients. SOSC and RYAP split into two separate distribution programs in 2024 and are active members of the Ambassador to Partner Agency Pathway Cohort.



General Methods



OFB Food System Organizers conducted video interviews with 23 of 27 Food Systems Ambassador Program alumni. All program alumni were asked to participate in this evaluation. Interviews were conducted in Spanish or English depending on the language preference of the ambassador. Interview participants were provided a \$50 gift card for their time.

The interview questions were designed using plain language to support 'English as a second language' speakers. The aim was to assess the ambassadors' satisfaction and foster meaningful discussions about their experiences with project implementation, system navigation, and interactions with OFB staff. For reference, the full set of interview questions is available in the appendix.

It is important to note the bias that is likely present in this evaluation. The evaluation was conducted by a member of Oregon Food Bank staff. Ambassadors were encouraged to share any and all feedback, positive or negative, in a supportive space. Staff explicitly stated that feedback would not impact the ambassador's partnership with the food bank or eligibility for future OFB grants. However, power dynamics between staff and community members are present and should be considered.

Key Findings: What story does this data tell?

Program participants were able to give multiple responses as each applied to their experiences; percentages are the number of participants that chose those answers.

The interview data reveals several key insights about the Food Systems Ambassador program and its impact on alumni.



Program Support and Success Factors

Alumni attribute success largely to the support provided by Oregon Food Bank staff and the assistance in resource navigation. This highlights relationship building and resource guidance as key components in achieving program outcomes. Additionally, program participants remarked that engagement with OFB assisted in expansion of community and professional networks.

"It has opened up a lot of different connections for me. I'm pursuing leads that Devin recommended and have an expanding network of folks doing this work in the Willamette Valley. I've become a more familiar face in the community and have built trust in the community."

— Ameyali Manon-Ferguson (she/her)

What about the ambassador program did you like? What contributed to your success?

29%—Support from OFB staff

12%—Networking and new connections

13%—Access to OFB resources

7%—Food distribution support

12%—Resource navigation and access

2%—Volunteer management support

5%—Program flexibility and timeline

3%—Personal and professional growth

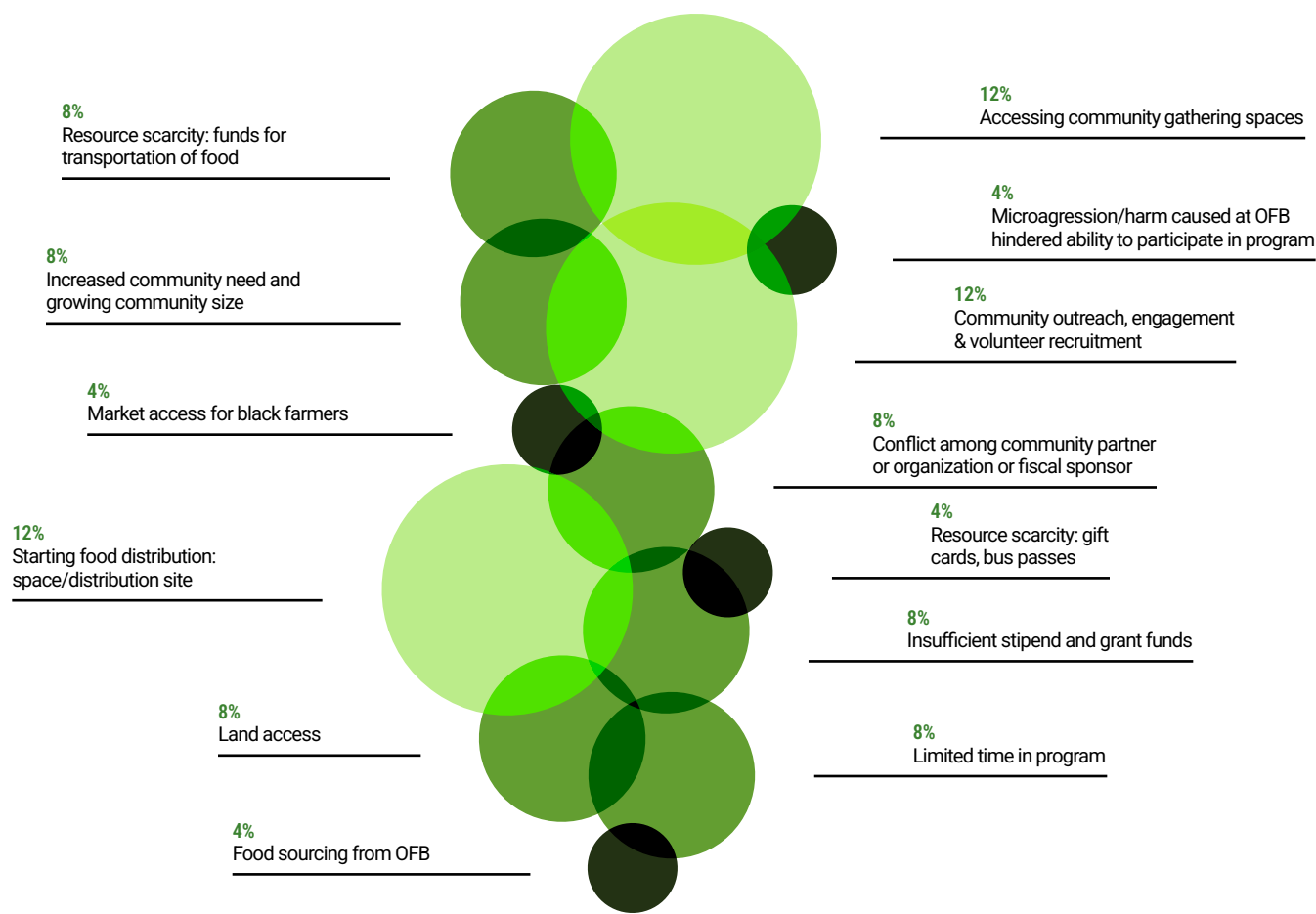
7%—Program and project development

10%—Being in a position to support the community

Challenges Faced

Alumni encountered significant challenges in finding space for gatherings, organizing food distribution, and engaging community members. These challenges highlight areas where additional support or resources may be needed. Participants noted the following challenges.

What about the ambassador program was challenging?



Desired Program Improvements

Alumni suggested that the program could benefit from an increase in connection opportunities, such as cohort meetings and alumni site visits. They also expressed a need for sustained support, both programmatic and financial, beyond the program term, as well as more guidance on fiscal sponsorship.

“This program has been very impactful. I’ve been a member of the community for so long, but my participation in this program has helped me expand my community reach. People out of the state hear of this program even prior to moving to Oregon. People who I have never met have heard of my name and the work that I am doing.”

— Liban Satu (he/him)

What would you change about the program?

1 in 23—Addition of professional development experiences

4 in 23—Increase connections, site visits, and info sharing with previous ambassadors

1 in 23—Assistance with volunteer training and outreach

5 in 23—Sustainable/continued support after program year

1 in 23—Create support space for BIPOC leaders

3 in 23—Increase program budget/grant fund

1 in 23—More program structure

2 in 23—Expand program to work with more communities

6 in 23—Increase connection among ambassador cohort

3 in 23—Increase guidance and resources around fiscal sponsorship

1 in 23—Create grant data base

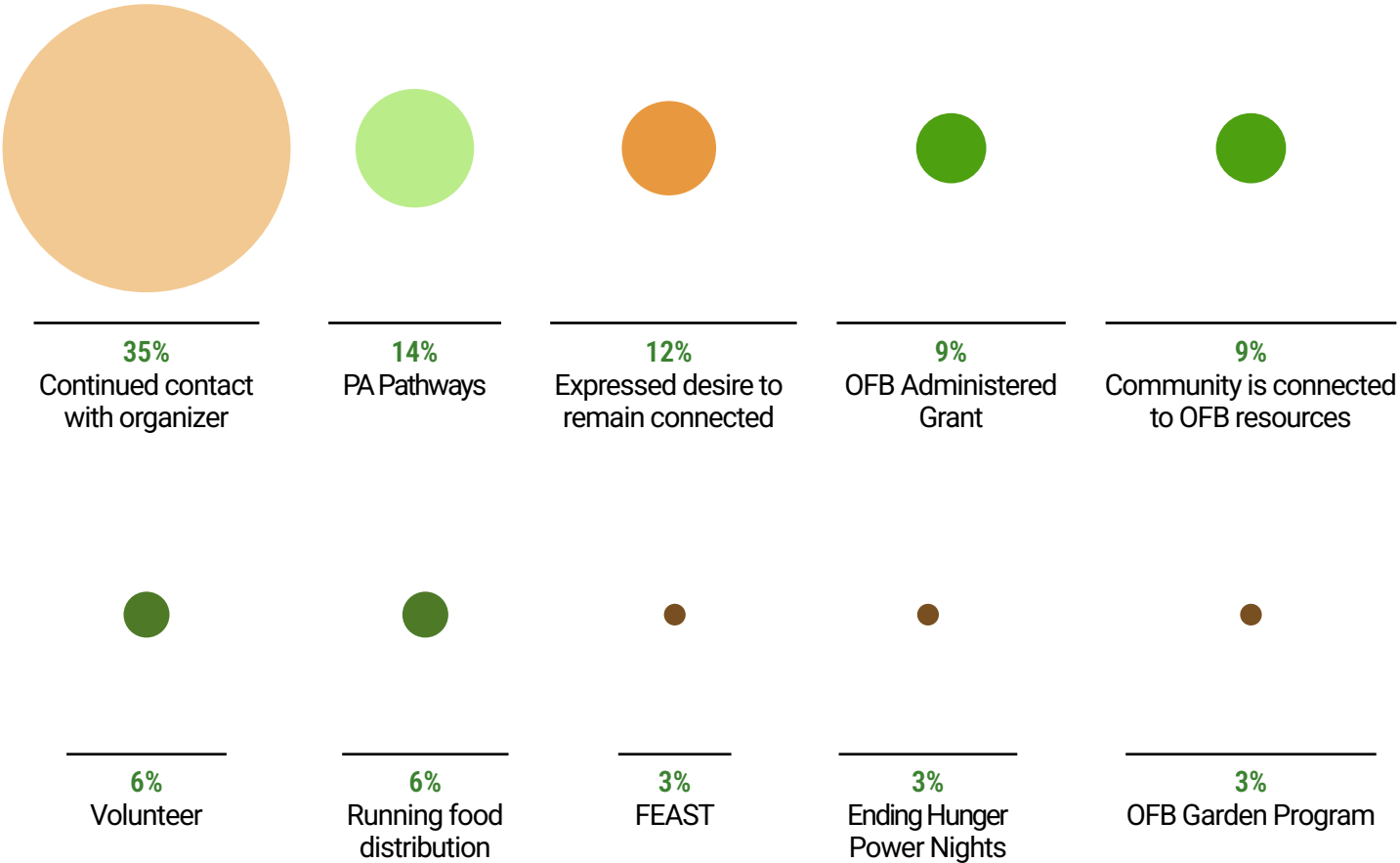
1 in 23—Increase OFB staff presence at community events

1 in 23—Increase resources for volunteer training and compliance

Continued Engagement

Many alumni plan to stay connected with OFB, with over half intending to maintain contact with their community organizer and about a quarter engaging through the PA Pathways program. This suggests that ongoing relationships with OFB are valued and beneficial. Here's how alumni plan to stay connected.

How will you and your community stay connected to the Oregon Food Bank?



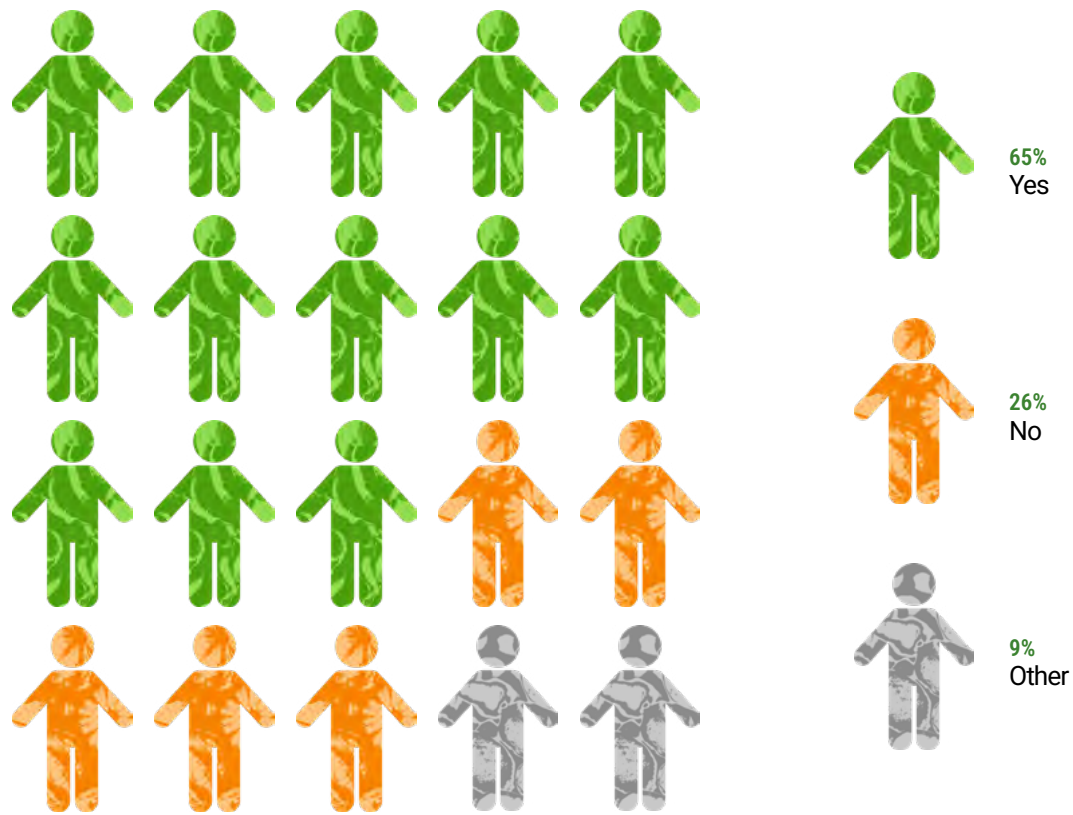


Food Access

Over half of alumni reported that their communities experienced increased access to cultural foods, while three quarters reported an increase in access to general food resources following participation in the program. It is important to

note that many communities do not have access to cultural foods through Oregon Food Bank’s food distribution efforts. Here’s how alumni responded when asked “Do you feel your community has increased access to culturally familiar foods?”

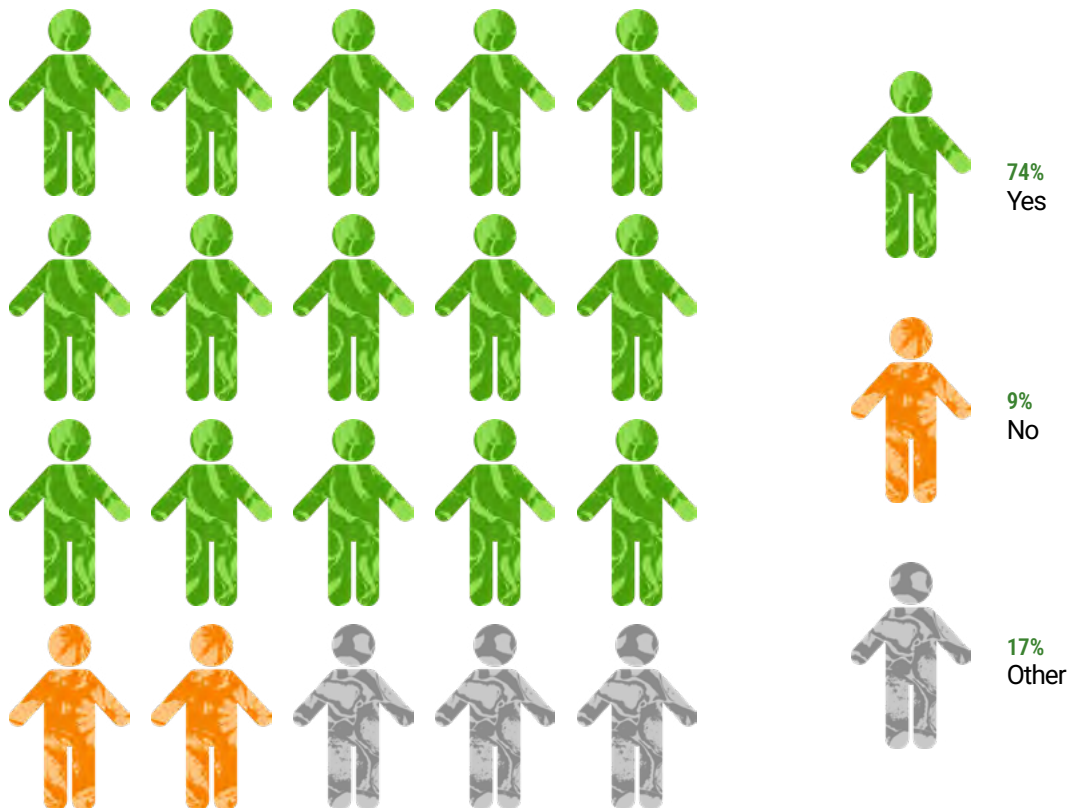
Do you feel your community has increased access to culturally familiar foods?



“There is not a lot of cultural foods for us. We get that food from local gardeners. Now our food distribution serves a much more diverse population and we get all kinds of food we don't cook with or know how to cook. The Latino community's needs are not being met through the food we are receiving from the food bank.”

— Lourdez Estrada (she/her)

Do you feel your community has increased access to food following your participation in the program?



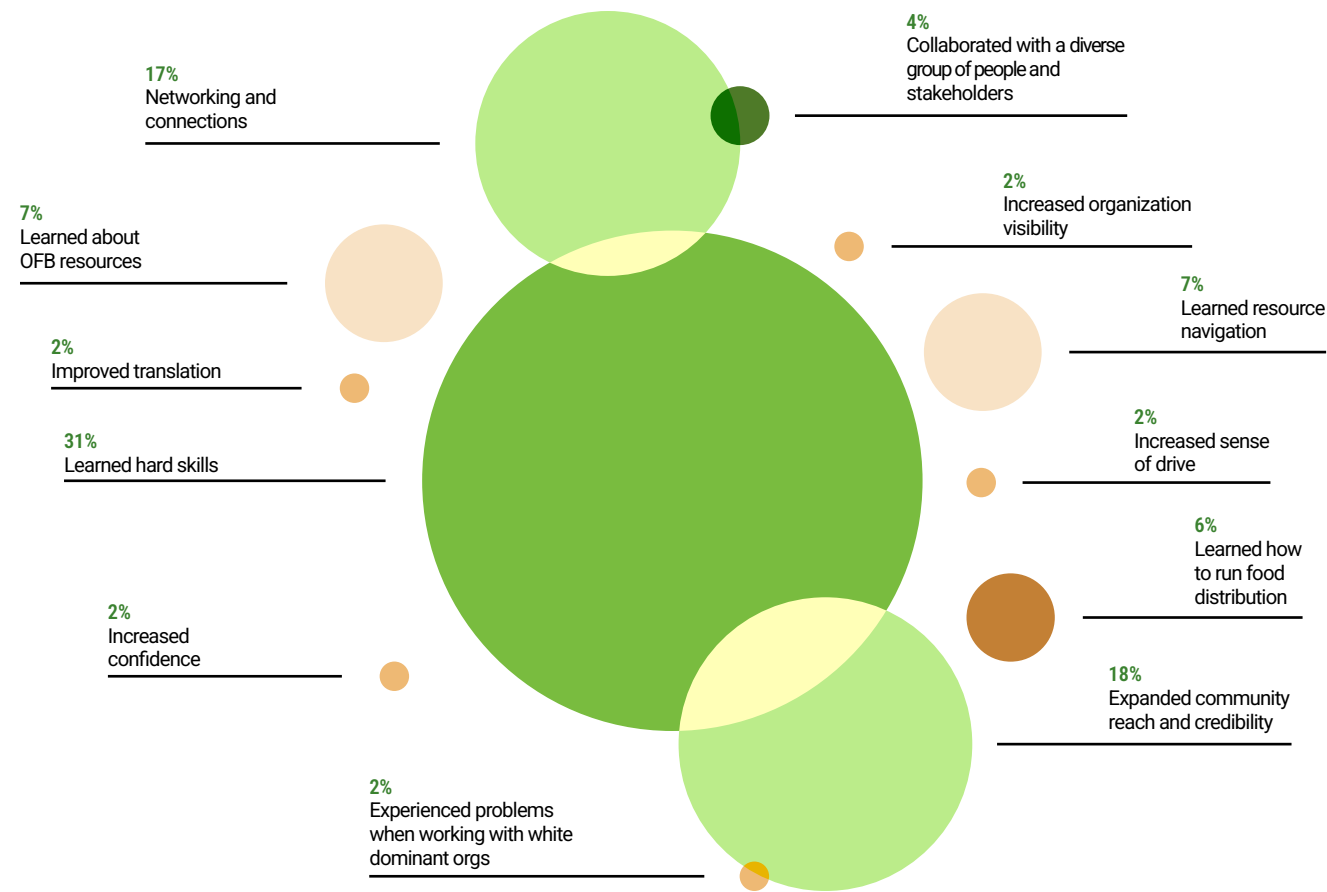
Leadership Development

Alumni noted significant growth in technical skills such as communication, project management, and advocacy/organizing as a key benefit of the program. This underscores the program’s role in enhancing leadership capabilities. Here’s how they described their growth.

“Before, my community didn’t know much about the resources the food bank has, and through my involvement I have been able to share more about what resources are available.”

— Eman Abbas (she/her)

How has this program affected you as a community leader?

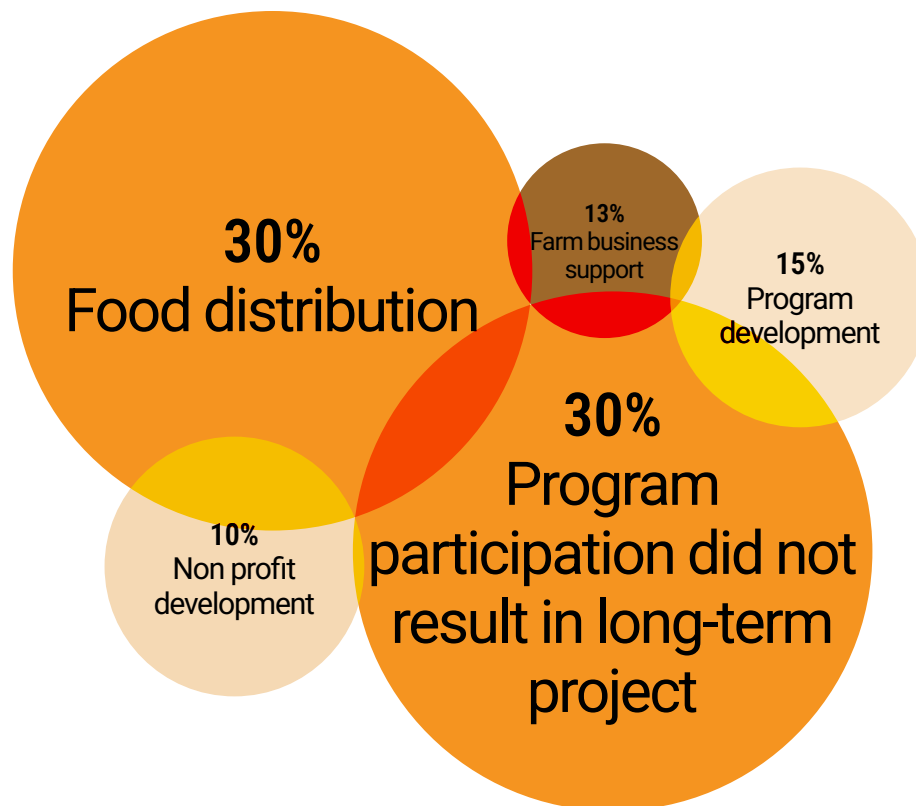


Long-term Projects

The most common long-term initiative resulting from alumni involvement was food distribution programming. This indicates that the program effectively supports the creation of sustainable, impactful projects. Here's how alumni responded when asked "How has your work in the ambassador program led to a long-term project, program, and/or business or organization?"

Overall, the evaluation survey highlights the program's success in developing technical skills, fostering community engagement, and improving food access, while also identifying areas for improvement in terms of ongoing support and connectivity.

Has your work in the ambassador program led to a long-term project, program, and/or business or organization?



Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on direct feedback from ambassador alumni.

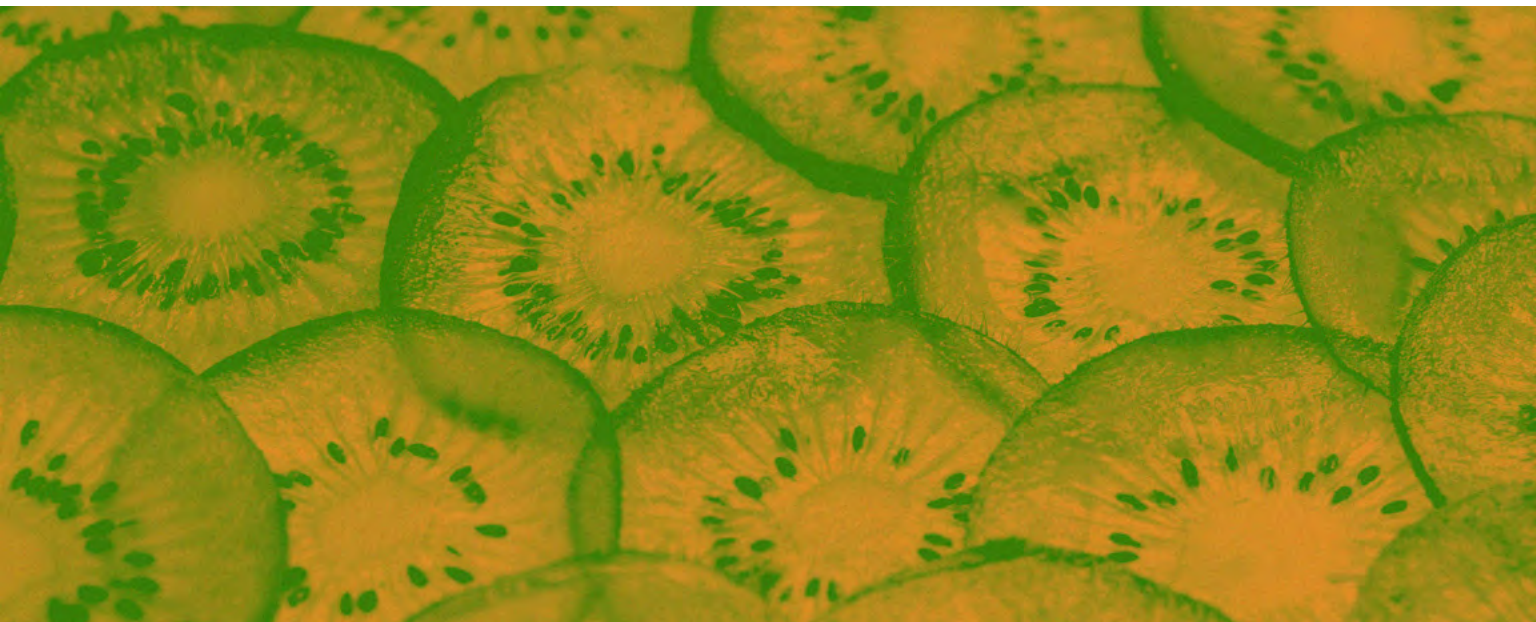
Food Systems Ambassador Program Improvements

- Create an ambassador mentorship program where ambassador alumni can support current cohort participants;
- Develop a fiscal sponsor database and training presentation;
- Create a toolkit for community leaders and organizations hoping to start food distribution work;
- Create metrics surrounding a structured 'Food Distribution Planning' to clearly communicate basic guidelines and requirements to run a food distribution program;
- Increase virtual and in person gatherings;
- Host networking events for current Food Systems Ambassadors to connect with alumni, OFB staff and community partners;



Oregon Food Bank Systems Improvements

- Internally systematize alumni support for Food Systems Ambassadors by assigning specific alumni to a community food system organizer;
- Ensure community Food Systems Organizers will annually attend Microaggressions and Active Bystander training;
- Understand internal capacity for new food distribution partners and create support that Community Food Systems Organizers can offer ambassadors;
- Set expectations around what support in the program will look like over time and reaching the goal we set out to achieve in the program time frame;
- Determine internal capacity for ambassador organization fundraising development;
- Create an annual schedule for cohort and alumni gatherings, with organizational improvement presentations built in based on shared needs;
- Invest in learning metro region resources including grant programs, land access, distribution space, gathering space, non-profit development, etcetera;
- Create cross cultural understanding of norms around volunteering and community service;





Looking Forward

One of the main questions emerging from this evaluation is: given our limited budget and staff capacity, how much long-term support can Oregon Food Bank (OFB) realistically provide? This evaluation has highlighted the need for us to reconsider how OFB can sustainably support community leaders and organizations, while establishing clear and thoughtful boundaries around the resources and support available. As an organization dedicated to eliminating hunger and its root causes, we must ask ourselves how we can effectively resource and support community leaders in their systems change efforts, while reducing OFB staff's role as the primary gatekeeper to those resources. The Community Food Systems team at OFB will continue to explore these questions as we plan the future of the Food Systems Ambassador program.

This report has identified both immediate and long-term changes that will be implemented in response to the valuable feed-

back from program alumni. The greatest strength of the Food Systems Ambassador program lies in its adaptability, enabling program staff to respond effectively to challenges such as pandemics, natural disasters, elections and legislative sessions, all in service of meeting the evolving needs of ambassador communities. Moving forward, program staff will continue to evaluate the program and alumni experiences, integrating feedback to build a truly community-led initiative. As an organization, OFB is deeply committed to celebrating and elevating the voices and accomplishments of program participants and community partners. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to ambassador alumni for their work, resilience, innovation, and determination in the ongoing effort to ensure that no one goes hungry.



Thank you

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**Together, we can end hunger
and its root causes for good.**

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