

Diversity and Civic Leadership Program



Next Generation of Leaders

In 2006, City Council took a historic step in equity and community engagement by investing in the Diversity and Civic Leadership (DCL) Program. The creation of the DCL Program forged a formal and ongoing partnership between City government and community organizations.

The City invested in the DCL Program to help realize the ambitious goal of bringing the voices of all Portlanders — particularly our BIPOC, immigrant, and refugee communities— into civic decisions that affect all Portlanders. The creation of the DCL changed the relationship between people and government by providing leadership skill development, culturally relevant community-building, and new ways to connect with City officials to shape public policy.

DCL Program at Work

The DCL Program provides annual grants to community organizations to design and implement culturally-specific leadership development programs for the communities they serve. Over the years, DCL has seen their graduates earn the leadership skills and confidence to run for City Council, serve as executive directors of community-based organizations, and advocate for social change in Portland.

Each year, the DCL program continues to grow along with our community partners, and collectively, we are working together to advance, train and cultivate more leadership opportunities to empower Portland's diverse communities.

In ten years, DCL organizations have collectively trained 673 people in culturally-specific leadership skills.

Participating DCL Nonprofit Organizations

Urban League's Advocacy and Civic Engagement Program

aims to eliminate health disparities through outreach, social support, and community education. It teaches Black Oregonians organizing skills to influence public policy and legislation and promote racial equity.

IRCO's Engage Program empowers communities of color to identify and understand governance structures, develop leadership opportunities, and foster effective representation on boards, committees, and commissions.

Latino Network's Líderes Program aims to increase equity in community involvement by engaging Latinx in the governance of the city. It introduces participants to local government structures, officials, and decision-making processes.

NAYA's Oregon LEAD Program provides seven months of interdisciplinary leadership, skill building, professional training, and networking opportunities which build leadership capacity across Native communities throughout Oregon.

Unite Oregon's PILOT Program addresses the challenges faced by emerging immigrant and refugee leaders and groups through leadership and skill building convenings.



Debbie Cabrales is a 2018 graduate of the Latino Network's DCL program Academia de Líderes. She joined as a single mom because she wanted to gain more skills and the confidence to be in spaces where "she knew she belonged." With this program, she eventually became a staff member at Latino Network, and then became the executive director of Centro de Servicios de Campesinos, an organization that provides legal services to farmworkers. From there, she was also elected to the Woodburn City Council.

Cabrales decided to run for council because she felt that having representation from people who looked like her was necessary to make positive change in her community. She credits the Líderes program as her first steppingstone and giving her the confidence to run.

"Líderes showed me that if people do not make space for me at the table, that I need to bring my own table and chair to create that space not only for me but for people like me that are not given a chance or are being shut out," Cabrales says. "The knowledge I have gained has... made me realize the type of leader that I am, and the amount of change that I can make, how I can show up to spaces, and be confident as to why I am there."

To read more stories about our DCL graduates and find out more about the program, please visit our website: portland.gov/civic/diversity-and-civic-leadership

Promote the Common Good: The Office of Community & Civic Life is building stronger communities by supporting and empowering Portlanders. We think, act, and partner with our communities to better understand and take care of their diverse needs. We invite you to join us in this continuous, much needed work to make our communities safer and more welcoming for all. Find out more: www.portland.gov/civic