

BEAVERTON, OR
Mayor Denny Doyle

Investing in Diverse Leaders for a Thriving, Multicultural City

The Beaverton Organizing and Leadership Development (BOLD) Program is a key strategy of the city's Cultural Inclusion Program, which is designed to increase participation of underrepresented communities in city government. BOLD seeks to identify, engage and train emerging leaders from immigrant and refugee communities and communities of color interested in city government and advocacy at the local level. The program is designed around three simple goals: grow new leaders, build cross-cultural relationships, and lay the groundwork for civic engagement.

As one of the most racially and ethnically diverse cities in Oregon, Beaverton's charge to ensure that all communities are involved in decision-making affecting core city issues is complex. Beaverton is a city of just under 100,000 where one in five residents is foreign-born, one in three is a person of color, and more than 100 languages are spoken in the homes of students in the Beaverton School District. Within this atmosphere, BOLD serves as a concrete way to invest in building diverse leaders and ambassadors to hard-to-reach communities. It provides a structure and clear path by which emerging leaders from diverse backgrounds can become oriented and empowered to participate in decisions that affect their lives.

The BOLD Program, currently in its eighth year, has graduated more than 130 participants to date. Each year, BOLD brings together a diverse cross-section of the Beaverton community, with as many as 15 different countries represented in a single cohort. Interpretation is provided in multiple languages to accommodate participation by English language learners. The cohorts are also intentionally intergenerational, with participants ranging from high school to retirement age. Through the years, BOLD has become a unique and dedicated space for immigrants, refugees and other people of color to come together, discover their common goals and struggles, and find support to pursue community leadership opportunities.

The program includes three full days of hands-on sessions focused on building leadership, community organizing, and advocacy skills; strengthening cross-cultural understanding and solidarity; and providing an in-depth orientation to city government and opportunities for engagement. It uses a popular education model, building on the knowledge and experiences of participants. Training days include interactive workshops, city-led modules that introduce participants to staff and elected officials, and concrete skill-building exercises such as practice giving public testimony. In addition to the core training days, the program engages participants in a presentation to Beaverton City Council, information sessions on city boards and commissions, alumni events, and more activities throughout the year. The curriculum is designed to orient participants to an array of options for engagement at the local level so that they can discern where they want to be involved. City staff build direct relationships with participants and do tailored follow-up to support meaningful and sustained engagement.

BOLD is made possible through a strong partnership with Unite Oregon, a grassroots community-based organization that is a long-time partner of the city. An organization created for and led by immigrants, refugees and people of color, Unite Oregon enables recruitment efforts for the program to reach many who otherwise would not have an entry point to city government or may be hesitant to engage. The organization also brings expertise in leadership development and has developed a strong, culturally-relevant curriculum that is very effective in engaging multiracial cohorts.

The BOLD Program has been recognized by a number of national organizations and a member of Congress for its innovative approach to engaging underrepresented populations in local government. Success of the program is measured by tracking the post-graduation community involvement of individual participants. Activities such as lobbying at the city or state level, serving on city or community boards, participating in project committees and action planning, running for elected office, and other key community leadership positions have been documented as strong indicators of success. More than half of participants engage in supplemental activities after graduating and a significant percentage take on volunteer roles ranging from short-term to multi-year commitments. Officials believe one of the strongest measures of success may be that BOLD graduates have now served on at least eight of the city's standing advisory boards and commissions and a series of other city committees, demonstrating long-term, meaningful engagement that is changing the conversation in those spaces. Though the program does not yet have alumni in elected office, this is a clear goal that is presented in various ways during the program.

Beaverton officials say that, beyond direct successes in engagement of graduates in existing programs, BOLD has helped form new partnerships and collaborations with culturally-specific organizations in the area. The program, they believe, has become a primary source of connections and liaisons to support the broader work of the cultural inclusion program, which has observed ripple effects throughout the community as a result. More details on the program are at www.BeavertonOregon.gov/BOLD.

Additional information is available from Alexis Ball, Equity & Inclusion Manager, at aball@BeavertonOregon.gov or 503-526-2503.