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Coordinating Diverse Public Programs in the Library

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Coordinating Diverse Public Programs in the Library

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Introduction

In spring of 2015, the University of Oregon Libraries (UO Libraries) co-sponsored a release event for the Urban League of Portland's *State of Black Oregon 2015 Report* to increase campus diversity initiatives and community engagement. The event inspired collaboration across the campus and state to bring together multiple university and community partners, including UO Libraries, the University of Oregon's Planning, Public Policy, and Management Program (PPPM), and the Urban League of Portland (ULPDX). Collaborations between libraries, nonprofit organizations, and other stakeholders highlight one aspect of the central role libraries serve as connectors in the local and regional communities. By co-sponsoring this event, UO Libraries furthered the University of Oregon's educational mission to promote public scholarship and civic engagement, support community development, and increase diversity through meaningful and thoughtful programs. This article will detail how this partnership materialized, from buy-in to execution, as well as recommendations for libraries interested in coordinating with local community-centered nonprofit organizations to develop opportunities for diverse public programs throughout Oregon.

Finding Partners

UO Libraries is a natural partner for nonprofit organizations that deliver community-centered programming like the *State of Black Oregon* release event. UO Libraries is a strong collector of Oregon nonprofit organization information as well as a proponent at the university and beyond for distribution of new knowledge. The University of Oregon's PPPM program plays an active part in coordinating local and regional community planning and engagement, creating evidenced-based scholarship, and supporting Oregon nonprofit organizations. According to its website, the Urban League of Portland, a chapter of the National Urban League, was founded in 1945 and serves as "one of the oldest African American service, civil rights and advocacy organizations" in Oregon. (<http://ulpdx.org/>) Historically, the Portland chapter has focused on increasing social, economic, legal and political equity for communities of color in the state of Oregon. In 2015 the ULPDX released the second report in the *State of Black Oregon* series, which focuses on current economic, health, and social issues as well as outcomes and opportunities facing people of African descent in Oregon.

The Importance of Diverse Public Programs

For the second edition of the *State of Black Oregon*, the ULPDX sought to expand outreach efforts throughout Oregon, outside of the usual Portland-metropolitan area and state capital region, in order to reach a wider population and generate more impact. Libraries are natural outreach partners for community-centered nonprofit organizations; they are no-cost natural distribution channels for information and scholarship about local, national and international issues affecting the public. The collaboration between the University of Oregon and ULPDX was initiated and coordinated by the authors, two librarians who felt it was imperative that the report release have a larger audience. Eugene, the second largest city in the state and the location of Oregon's flagship public university, was an ideal place to hold this event. As co-sponsors, UO Libraries and the UO PPPM program were able to provide gratis space and catering for the evening event. Both University of Oregon Libraries Dean Adriene Lim and Urban League of Portland President Nkenge Harmon Johnson provided introductory comments highlighting the importance of bringing the information in the *State of Black Oregon* to the public. Community leaders and University of Oregon scholars spoke about the re-



search methods, data collection, and analysis that generated the second edition of the report. ULPDX staff led a series of exercises to inspire community feedback and active discussion.

Planning a Diverse Public Program

The key to coordinating diverse public programs is first to find or create the opportunity. Utilize resources like *The Foundation Center* website (<http://foundationcenter.org>) to find local and regional nonprofit organizations with diverse missions and perform outreach



**THE STATE OF BLACK OREGON REPORT:
A Panel Discussion**

Thursday, May 28, 2015
6:30-8:00 p.m.
Knight Library Browsing Room
University of Oregon
Free and open to the public

A panel of researchers, scholars, and community leaders will present and discuss findings of the 2015 State of Black Oregon Report, a key project of the Urban League of Portland.

The result of a two-year program of research, the 2015 State of Black Oregon provides an updated look at how Black Oregonians are doing—in schools, jobs, and both urban and rural communities throughout the state. The 200-page report features 18 essays from leaders throughout Oregon on issues including universal childcare, health equity, gentrification, and entrepreneurship. There are 21 case studies from across the state, from Medford in the south, to rural Pendleton in the east, to Astoria and the central gentrifying urban centers.

STATE OF BLACK OREGON
JOIN THE MOVEMENT

Urban League of Portland

Co-sponsored by the University of Oregon Libraries, the UO Department of Planning, Public Policy and Management, and the Urban League of Portland

UNIVERSITY OF OREGON Libraries | PPPM Department of Planning, Public Policy and Management School of Architecture and Allied Arts | Urban League of Portland

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by offering gratis space and marketing for new initiatives, publications, or strategic plans. Reach out and recruit campus or local partners by illustrating how this type of event aligns with the strategic goals of your institution or public service mission. Working with the resources at your disposal, acquire sponsors at your institution or within your community who can provide gratis space, childcare, and/or catering. No or low-cost tickets, food and accessible scheduling are crucial considerations for community-centered nonprofit organizations that hold public events interested in attracting a larger and economically diverse audience from the local and campus communities. Request the time needed to coordinate across distance; nonprofit organizations follow different calendars than academic, school, or public libraries. Establish a marketing plan to promote the event via social media channels, public notice boards, and local media outlets to encourage wide participation. Plan the event around the space available at an accessible time and find speakers who can provide relevant local context. Oftentimes the nonprofit organizations can identify and coordinate experts, scholars, and others in the local area who are knowledgeable about the organization, issues, and community. Let the nonprofit organizations drive the content and public participation at the event. Make sure to capture and archive the event to make it freely available online.

Final Thoughts

Public programs that reflect diverse modes of thought, research, and discussion bring new users into the library and further solidifies the library as a community center. *The State of Black Oregon 2015 Report* release event at the University of Oregon served as both a catalyst for collaboration with a community-centered nonprofit and a successful method of outreach to local and campus communities. This event broadcast relevant research about diverse communities that was created in Oregon, for Oregonians. More information about the Urban League of Portland's State of Black Oregon Report can be found here:

http://researchguides.uoregon.edu/state_black_oregon 

