Many new groups formed and launched campaigns to make local change out of the mobilizations for racial justice in 2020. Vernonia Equality & Racial Justice (VERJ) in Columbia County formed during roadside Black Lives Matter demonstrations to advance campaigns for racial justice. VERJ’s successes include working with the City of Vernonia to draft and adopt a resolution denouncing racism, discrimination, and police brutality against Black people, establishing a plan to educate city leadership on implicit bias and racial equity, and committing the city to collaborating on a bias incident reporting system.

In 2020, every county in Oregon mobilized to protest the murders of Black and brown people killed by police. In 2021, rural Oregon mobilized to respond to the murders of Black people by white vigilantes. After Aidan Ellison was killed in Ashland, the Truth to Power Club at Ashland High School hosted virtual anti-racism workshops and painted a mural at the school celebrating Aidan’s life alongside other prominent Black, Indigenous, and people of color who have graduated from Ashland High School.

After Barry Washington, Jr. was murdered in downtown Bend, his white killer was immediately released by police with a minor charge of manslaughter. Central Oregon Peacekeepers and other groups organized vigils, rallies, and a successful campaign to push the district attorney to change the charge to second degree murder. When a local TV station put a video of the attack on their website against Barry’s family’s wishes, the Peacekeepers coordinated a successful campaign that asked advertisers to end their contracts until the video was removed.

Central Oregon Peacekeepers, Redmond Collective Action, The Helpers, and Central Oregon Democratic Socialists of America teamed up across three counties and the Warm Springs community to distribute resources to tear families apart. They expanded to use local law enforcement resources to detain and deport rural Oregonians despite Oregon’s Sanctuary Law.

Together with a coalition of allied organizations, we helped draft the Sanctuary Promise Act that closes those loopholes to ensure that the federal government can no longer use local public resources to tear families apart. In July, the Sanctuary Promise Act was signed into law and went into effect.

Human dignity groups across 16 counties uncovered major legal loopholes that Immigration and Customs Enforcement exploited to use local law enforcement resources to detain and deport rural Oregonians despite Oregon’s Sanctuary Law.

In addition to the Sanctuary Promise Act, six key policies the ROP network prioritized because they will help rural communities move from barely surviving to thriving were successfully signed into law. After human dignity groups drafted policy, wrote letters, and met with elected officials, together we passed the Childcare for Oregon Act, the Oregon Energy Affordability Act, the Drug Addiction Treatment & Recovery Act, and funding to expand broadband internet access.

When Creswell’s annual 4th of July parade was cancelled due to COVID-19, Proud Boys and so-called patriot groups announced they would hold their own parade and statewide gathering. Community leaders who spoke out received threats and therefore announced their parade. A week later, the community of Cottage Grove learned the same Proud Boys were eager to march in their town’s annual festival’s parade. More than 100 business owners, service agencies, faith leaders, and concerned neighbors succeeded in convincing the festival’s board to exclude the Proud Boys with a heartfelt letter campaign declaring hate has no presence in their community.

ROP virtually convened hundreds of rural organizers and small-town community leaders for strategy sessions, the annual Rural Caucus, and living room conversations to develop local and statewide plans for the year.

In 2021, more than 1,200 people every month, many of whom are refugee and migrant farm-working families systematically excluded from other services because of documentation requirements, language accessibility, and cultural competency. This program has successfully raised awareness of these barriers and several local agencies have changed their practices, hired interpreters, and adapted to better serve the entire community.

Led by multiple community partners and volunteers, the food pantry at our Community Building Center in Cottage Grove shared food and supplies with more than 1,200 people every month, many of whom are refugee and migrant farm-working families systematically excluded from other services because of documentation requirements, language accessibility, and cultural competency. This program has successfully raised awareness of these barriers and several local agencies have changed their practices, hired interpreters, and adapted to better serve the entire community.

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ROP's mission is to strengthen the skills, resources, and vision of primary leadership in local autonomous human dignity groups with a goal of keeping such groups a vibrant source for a just democracy. More than 80 human dignity groups and thousands of community leaders worked together to advance democracy in small-town and rural Oregon. From April 2020 to April 2021, ten Rural Organizing Fellows virtually convened to share skills, organizing strategies, and to build up their organizing toolboxes.

ROP is transforming our records of powerful community organizing into an archival collection! These unique materials will be featured in a traveling exhibit celebrating ROP's 30th anniversary next year, giving us all a chance to learn from 30 years of the ROP network's history and to see this exhibit in your town! To see the exhibit in your town, reach out if you'd like to see this exhibit in your town!

In 2021, we completed the second season of Rural Roots Rising, our monthly podcast and radio show that broadcasts on 20 community radio stations across the state. Rural Roots Rising featured rural organizers and media-makers who are organizing to respond to white supremacist violence, climate disasters, language accessibility, and housing crises. Listen to Rural Roots Rising wherever you get your podcasts or at RuralRootsRising.org.

Let's connect! Give us a call, check out our website and follow us on social media!