

MT. HOOD CABLE REGULATORY COMMISSION

FY 22-23

ANNUAL REPORT



Introduction from the Chair

Another year has passed and the cable and telecommunications landscape continues to undergo profound shifts. Technology advancements and policy changes, such as the emergence of next-generation streaming platforms and new Federal Communications Commission rules governing digital discrimination, signal the diminishing relevance of cable TV-only regulation to our communities.

While the MHCRC and our professional staff have long monitored and attempted to influence this shift, our efforts over the past year have focused on positioning us to lead our jurisdictions through a process to more formally and proactively plan for our collective future. Specifically, our staff continued to build expertise and influence through engagement in national professional and legislative forums and we hired an experienced consulting team to develop and implement an engagement process for the coming year that is guided by several core objectives:

- 1. Establishing Understanding:** We seek to provide comprehensive insights into the MHCRC's roles, challenges, and strategic direction, ensuring alignment with member jurisdiction priorities.
- 2. Assessing Needs:** Gathering input on specific needs related to cable and telecommunications systems, community media support, and potential IGA adjustments to enhance service delivery.
- 3. Building Relationships:** Fostering positive, collaborative relationships with key contacts in each jurisdiction to facilitate ongoing communication and collaboration.
- 4. Promoting Informed Decision-Making:** Ensuring stakeholders are well-informed about MHCRC initiatives, empowering them to make informed decisions.

The industry transition to broadband-centric services presents challenges, notably declining revenue from cable franchise and PEG fees, with legislative developments potentially further impacting regulatory dynamics. Our strategic planning engagement efforts will navigate these challenges collaboratively and through this process we aim to develop a comprehensive long-term strategy and propose recommendations that align with our collective priorities and aspirations.

In April 2024, we began initiating discussions with key contacts within each jurisdiction to understand local dynamics and needs. Briefings with jurisdiction councils will follow, and ongoing collaborative engagement sessions are planned to ensure transparency and alignment with our strategic objectives.

Despite the complexities of our evolving landscape and the focus on the future, the MHCRC's everyday successes in the realm of consumer advocacy and local access to technology are still of significance. Given the declining resources we are experiencing, I want to specifically acknowledge the dedication and resilience of our community media centers and community technology grantees, which continue to innovate and deepen their impact, particularly within low-income communities and communities of color.

I extend my sincere gratitude to all who support our endeavors and encourage you to reflect on the challenges and opportunities outlined in this report and engage with us in the strategic planning process. Together, we will navigate these uncharted waters, forge stronger communities, and advance equitable access to communication technologies.

Julia DeGraw

MHCRC Chair



Who We Are

We are eight volunteers who represent our communities' cable communications technology needs. We are appointed by the six MHCRC Member Jurisdictions: Multnomah County, and the Cities of Fairview, Gresham, Portland, Troutdale, and Wood Village.

Commissioners | Julia DeGraw, **Chair**; Scott Harden, **Vice Chair**; Jeff Dennerline; Leslie Goodlow; Richard Roche; Carol Studenmund; Norm Thomas; Cherri Wagner. For more information about your Commissioners, bios are found on the MHCRC Website: www.mhcrc.org/about-the-mhcrc/meet-the-commission.

Staff | Donnie Oliveira, Director; Eric Engstrom, Deputy Director; Seema Gadh Kumar, Community Technology Chief, Andrew Speer, Franchise Utility Manager; Rebecca Gibbons, Strategic Initiatives Manager; Rana DeBey, MHCRC Community Grants Manager; Kathleen Lefebvre, Administrative Specialist; Douglas Imaralu, Finance Manager; Kevin Block, Policy Coordinator.

What We Do

- **Cable Franchise Negotiation & Compliance:**

We conduct franchise negotiations, renewals, and transfers of ownership, and enforce cable company compliance with franchise agreements.

- **Consumer Protections:**

We monitor cable provider customer service data, and step in to support consumers with complaint resolution.

- **Policy & Advocacy:**

We participate in communications policy and legislative advocacy efforts to protect local control of the public right-of-way.

- **Community Media:**

We provide ongoing support to community media organizations serving Portland and East Multnomah County.

- **Community Technology Grants:**

We administer a competitive grants program which allocates approximately \$1.5 million annually to libraries, schools, local governments, and nonprofit community organizations.

- **Digital Equity & Inclusion:**

We promote digital equity and inclusion in our grants, policy, and advocacy work.

Cable Franchise Negotiation & Compliance

MHCRC franchise negotiation, management, and compliance services provide Member Jurisdictions with economies of scale in:

- Franchise negotiations, renewals, and transfers of ownership.
- Routine auditing of franchise fees to ensure Member Jurisdictions are accurately compensated under the terms of the agreement and statutes.
- Monitoring of cable provider performance metrics including customer service standards, subscriber reporting, and fiscal reporting.
- Customer complaint resolutions.
- Enforcement of compliance with the franchise agreement, and the legal and policy frameworks set by federal law.

Cable Franchise Negotiations:

During the reporting period, the MHCRC continued negotiation of renewal cable franchise agreements with Comcast Corporation and Ziplly Fiber on behalf of Member Jurisdictions. Comcast negotiations are ongoing and are expected to conclude in 2024.

Consumer Protections - Customer Complaint Line:

During the reporting period, the MHCRC received and resolved complaints via phone and email for less than 100 subscribers.

Customers have three options if they wish to file a complaint. Customers can call 311 or 503-823-5385. A representative of the City of Portland's 311 team will document the complaint for the MHCRC and connect customers to cable company representatives to resolve issues. Customers can also send an email detailing their complaint to info@mhcrc.org. And finally, customers can fill out an online form on the MHCRC website at www.mhcrc.org/customer-support.

MHCRC Reaches Agreement with Comcast to Further Digital Equity in the Community

The MHCRC didn't let outdated legislative frameworks stop them from pursuing opportunities to collaborate with Comcast to ensure people who experience barriers to being digitally connected are supported through unique, locally driven digital inclusion programs and services.

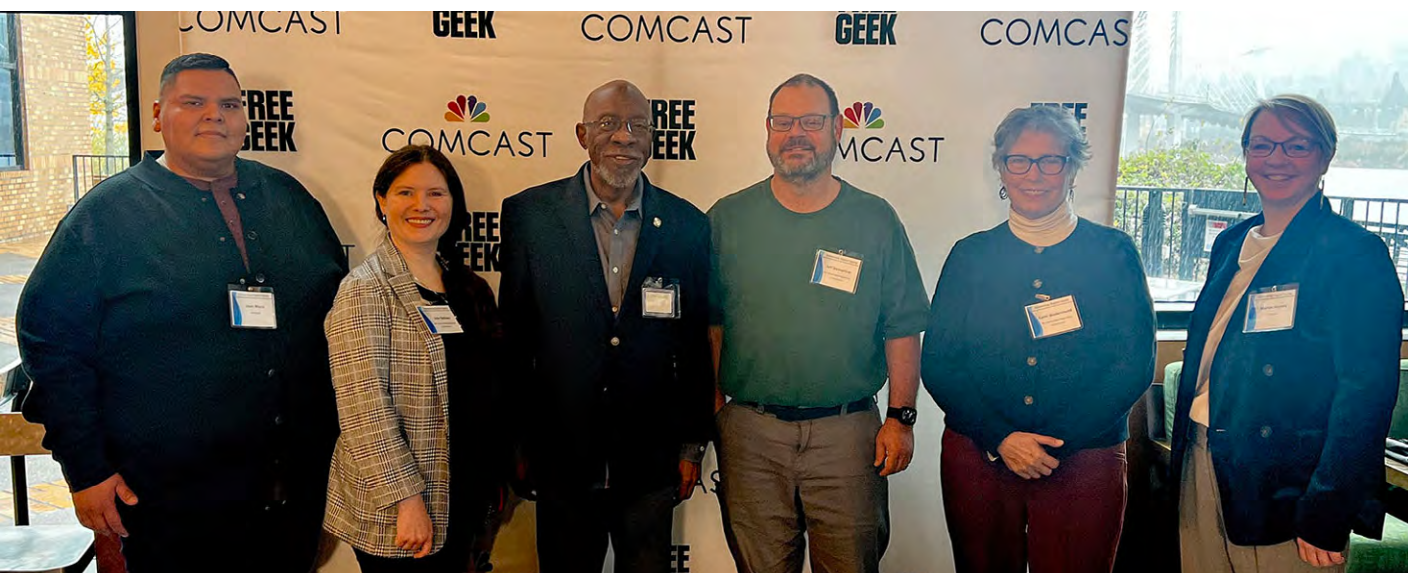
At the conclusion of a prior franchise in 2011, Comcast set aside monies for the benefit of the local communities, overseen by the MHCRC, to serve hard to reach locations with cable system line extensions. Dubbed the "I-Net End Fund", the MHCRC has been monitoring expenditures applied against the fund and recognized that with cable system buildout near universal the fund could have more impact if directed towards local digital equity initiatives.

In spring 2023, the MHCRC and Comcast were presented with an opportunity to invest these resources in support of scaling a community-focused initiative led by Free Geek, a leading local non-profit advancing economic equity through technology training and career building.

The MHCRC crafted an agreement with Comcast that allows the use of \$2 million of the \$4 million remaining I-Net End Fund available for a digital adoption and skills training program administered by Free Geek, and for the remaining monies in the I-Net End Fund to be committed in response to community driven digital equity needs before June 2025.

This initial investment will help the most disconnected communities in Multnomah County get online and receive the resources, devices, and technology education needed to advance digital skills for education and work and enhance economic mobility.

The MHCRC is also ensuring the current and future investments will be evaluated and outcomes documented.



Policy & Legislative Advocacy

The MHCRC monitors and advocates on behalf of the jurisdictions on legislation and policies that impact local authority and the provision of telecommunications services. This includes activities such as:

- Monitoring policy and legislation development at the local, state, and federal level.
- Advocating on behalf of Member Jurisdictions with state and federal elected officials.
- Providing comments and reply comments to policymaking bodies like the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA).
- Participating in local government coalitions to appeal policies that impede local government authority to manage the public right-of-way.
- Participating on boards and committees to ensure local community needs are included in policy development. For example:
- MHCRC staff member, Rebecca Gibbons, was appointed to the National Association of Telecommunications Officers and Advisors (NATOA) Board of Directors, while co-chairing their Broadband and Digital Equity Committee.
- Rebecca also served on the Federal Communications Commission's Communications Equity and Diversity Council (CEDC), representing municipal interests in developing recommendations to address digital discrimination by ISPs and other barriers that impact equitable access to broadband.

A few of the legislation, policy, and legal proceedings monitored in this reporting period included:

- Congressional legislation clarifying franchise obligations, advancing 6G technologies, and addressing digital redlining.
- State legislation related to broadband funding and support for the State of Oregon's Net Neutrality Bill.
- FCC activities, including President Biden's nominations for open seats, rules providing more competitive choice of communications services in multiple tenant environments, broadband consumer labeling rules, rules addressing cable and satellite price transparency, and rules aimed at addressing digital discrimination.
- Court cases related to right-of-way management including challenges to the FCC's Mixed-use Rule and 621 Order, net neutrality, cable operators billing practices, applicability of franchise fees to over-the-top (OTT) video service providers, and FCC definitions.

Federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) funding that is funneling through the State Broadband Office is earmarked for rural areas that meet the definition of unserved or underserved. Our policy work is focused on barriers preventing urban areas from receiving any federal funding for broadband infrastructure and digital equity work and to ensure that the needs of urban communities are not overlooked.

Community Technology Grants

The MHCRC awards grants to nonprofits, community organizations, libraries, schools, and government agencies within the six member jurisdictions through its Community Technology Grants program. Grants are awarded on an annual basis to projects utilizing media-creation tools and community media channels to address local needs and increase local discourse, civic participation and communication. For more information on program goals, eligibility, and how to apply, visit: www.mhcrc.org/community-grants. Grantees' completed videos can be viewed on Open Signal and MetroEast cable channels on the Comcast and Ziplly cable systems.

In this reporting period:



Organizations were awarded grants



Total grants



Grants prioritize racial equity as a central element



Organizations are first-time grantees

MHCRC Grantee Learning Event

In October 2023, 37 MHCRC Grantees gathered at the Laurelhurst Club for an opportunity to meet and discuss their experiences throughout the grant process. Through a facilitated discussion the Community Technology Grants Program recipients all had the opportunity to talk through the lessons they learned through their respective grant supported projects. This gathering also presented a chance to explore various avenues for partnering with our community media centers, Open Signal and MetroEast Community Media. Courtney Rae and Katmeow Garcia from Open Signal and John Lugton from MetroEast were present and fielded questions from each of the grantees. Standing out from the many takeaways was the opportunity to create a community network allowing for smooth collaboration between the grantees moving forward.



Examples of grantee projects awarded



CymaSpace

\$206,083

CymaSpace’s “PAH Creative Development” project looks to facilitate production of a new PAHcast (an ASL concept meaning “finally, cast off, or deprived of” and “joy and relief”) video series and provide much-needed access to equipment and training for Deaf and Hard-of-hearing (DHH) community of creators throughout Portland. The project will aim to produce 10 to 12 video series created by various members of the Deaf community, highlighting the diverse, intersectional perspectives within the community, prioritizing those who are women, BIPOC and LGBTQIA+. CymaSpace intends to host up to 16 workshops for the DHH community and intend to share out a minimum of 35 episodes of video content with the community media centers.



Northwest Children’s Theater & School

\$161,056

Northwest Children’s Theater & School’s “NW Children’s Theater Moves to Broadway: Streaming Infrastructure” project looks to create flexible, easy-to-use broadcast spaces where artists and students can intuitively record and share the video content they are creating in one of three newly-created performance spaces. NWCT plans to distribute a minimum of eight original performances, ranging from student directed/written one-act plays to world premiere plays by local artists, via Open Signal’s cable channels. The overall goal of the project is to create a facility allowing the community to connect in new and exciting ways, while also creating options for attendance for people who cannot join in-person.



Trash for Peace

\$28,047

Trash for Peace's Growing Digital Skills through Storytelling with Waste and Recycling project will launch a Media Advocates Committee pilot which includes eight community-represented staff who will each complete 18 hours of workshops to gain a foundation in mobile video production skills. Trash for Peace will also create a small on-site community video lab in collaboration with advocates who represent the diverse community of project beneficiaries (including: seniors, low-income, Spanish-firsts and Spanish-only speakers, public transportation riders and those who have self-identified as digital beginners). The lab will feature video equipment compatible with consumer mobile devices to extend storytelling techniques, while also creating a social learning space for all community to practice skills and create future content.



Self-Enhancement, Inc (SEI)

\$90,090

SEI's "Center for Self Enhancement Makerspace Studio: Expanding Community Engagement and Education Opportunities among Underserved Youth & Families" project plans to create a videography and production studio within their newly crafted maker space at their headquarters in N/NE Portland. After staff and mentor trainings, they will teach video production skills and digital technology literacy to at least 48 students over 20 weeks. This project aims to create up to ten youth led video projects that will be distributed to the broader community through MetroEast Community Media's cable channels.

Other grantees included: Accent Network, Caldera Arts, CETI: A Creative and Emergent Technology Institute, Desert Island Studios, Municipal Eco Resiliency Project (MERP), Outside the Frame, Open Signal, Portland Community College, Portland Art Museum Center for Untold Tomorrow (PAM CUT), Wisdom of the Elders, and Wonderfolk (Global Works Community Fund). For more information on the MHCRC Community Technology Grants Program visit: mhcr.org/community-grants/



Community Media Centers

Open Signal in Portland and MetroEast Community Media in Gresham received capital funds from the MHCRC to provide the community with Public, Educational and Government (PEG) access to media creation tools and training, cable channel distribution, and a wide-variety of locally produced content which is viewable on cable television channels. Open Signal also received operating funds from the City of Portland while MetroEast Community Media received operating funds from the MHCRC.

Open Signal and MetroEast provide live, gavel-to-gavel coverage of local government meetings, professional production service to nonprofits and government agencies, and low to no cost media training and resources to the community.

Both facilities are dedicated to digital equity and inclusion, and communities who identify as Black, Indigenous, people of color; English language learners; people living with disabilities, people with low incomes; and the nonprofits who align with these efforts.

Government Meetings

- MetroEast produced 381 hours of live government meetings during this reporting period.
- Open Signal broadcast 359 Portland City Council meetings, totaling 735 hours.

Original Programming

- MetroEast cablecast 1,623 new programs and 1,382 hours of original programming.
- Open Signal broadcast 7,200 new airings of work created by the community on its cable channels and online streaming network.

Workshops and Training

- Metro East offered a total of 43 training workshops to 188 participants.
- Open Signal spend 453 hours facilitating/teaching people how to create content through its Cohort Program.



Spotlight on Open Signal

In 2023 Open Signal celebrated its 40th anniversary with an outdoor party that engaged members and the surrounding community. The event featured screenings of work produced at Open Signal over 40 years, which highlighted the depth and breadth of its role in the community.

While 40 years of work in the community media space is an amazing milestone, there were many other reasons to celebrate in FY 22-23. Some other important work Open Signal accomplished in this reporting period includes:

- Providing nine local nonprofits with 170 hours of training on video production and trauma-informed media education through their Train the Trainer program. This program prepares nonprofit employees and volunteers to offer media training in their own communities while also having the option to check out equipment from Open Signal on an ongoing basis. The nine organizations included Street Roots, March of Dimes, KBOO Community Radio and Wisdom of the Elders.
- Organizing and scheduling 843 equipment/studio reservations to community members to provide access to industry-standard equipment on their productions. These resources are offered to Open Signal cohort graduates, series producers, and students of their media education workshops.
- Hosting 12 skill shares and networking events through Signal Share, a monthly gathering for Open Signal members. The events featured guest artist talks; skill shares on Open Broadcaster Software, their Mobile Cast Unit and animation; and networking events — engaging over 300 members.
- Broadcasting 2,515 hours of new independent community programs produced through their facilities. These programs included news, documentaries, event coverage and short films created by Portland's independent media makers.





Spotlight on MetroEast

Over the past year, MetroEast has undertaken a significant transformation in its educational approach, adopting a project-based Media Cohort model tailored to serve underserved communities more effectively. This strategic pivot yielded substantial outcomes in both their community impact and organizational sustainability, further reinforcing their mission to inspire diverse voices in media while strengthening community life.

The more targeted approach has made programs more attractive to grantmakers, resulting in increased funding from prestigious organizations such as the Marie Lamfrom Charitable Foundation and Collins Foundation. Additionally, through the MHCRC Community Tech Grant, program grantees have been able to pay MetroEast for initial training on hardware and software *literacy*.

The shift has required MetroEast to scale back on their broader public-facing classes. However, this strategic decision has allowed them to allocate resources more efficiently, focusing on deep, impactful engagements with impacts on the community.

Buidling Community Partnerships

Throughout the year, MetroEast partnered with several organizations, including Community for Positive Aging, The African Youth and Community Organization, Lifesource Oregon, Wonderfolk, SEI, The Rosewood Initiative, and It Takes a Village NW. These partnerships have allowed them to directly engage with and support BIPOC, low-income, senior citizen, and disabled participants, who are often underrepresented in media.

This focused approach has not only increased the relevance and reach of the programming, but also enhanced the participation rates in public facing classes, which saw an improvement in attendance from below 50% to approximately 70% in the first half of the year, stabilizing around 65% in the latter half. This improvement is a testament to the increased demand and commitment from participants, who value the now more limited but impactful opportunities offered at MetroEast.

Looking Forward

Moving forward, MetroEast remains committed to working on their project-based Media Cohort model. The aim is to continue enhancing the accessibility and inclusivity of media education, ensuring that all community voices have the opportunity to access media training and equipment to tell their stories. By continuing to adapt and innovate, MetroEast will strive to be at the forefront of media education and digital inclusion, making a meaningful difference in the lives of their direct participants and the broader community.

Strategic Planning

As the cable and telecommunications landscape continues to evolve, the MHCRC is committed to ensuring its strategic planning and intergovernmental agreement (IGA) accurately reflects the needs and aspirations of its member jurisdictions.

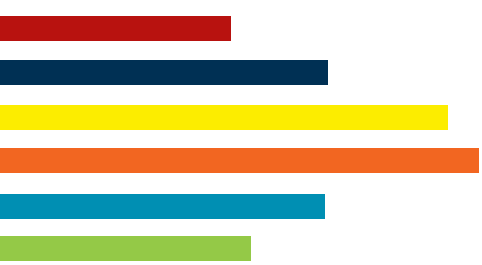
In December 2023, the MHCRC contracted with NEX Strategies LLC, an organizational development and strategic planning firm that supports efforts to build community, to lead the strategic planning process with the jurisdictions and community stakeholders. The goal of the planning process is to develop a long-term strategy and create recommendations for a refreshed Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) to achieve the communities' collective communications technology priorities.

While the federal legal construct for local authority over things such as fiber deployment for video and data services has and continues to be debated, the MHCRC has been proactively expanding its expertise alongside policy, technology, and industry developments. Amid an evolving landscape, the MHCRC's timing to engage in a local discussion about our current and future needs is critical for the jurisdictions, including our ability to serve as an effective community partner and consumer advocate for years to come.

Planning for Our Collective Future

Over the next several months the MHCRC and its consulting team, NEX Strategies, will be meeting with staff and elected officials with each jurisdiction and community stakeholders, providing multiple opportunities to engage in discussions about the shifting regulatory landscape and the needs, challenges, and opportunities that this presents.

To learn more about the process or to get involved, please contact us at info@mhcrc.org.



Fiscal Year 2022-23

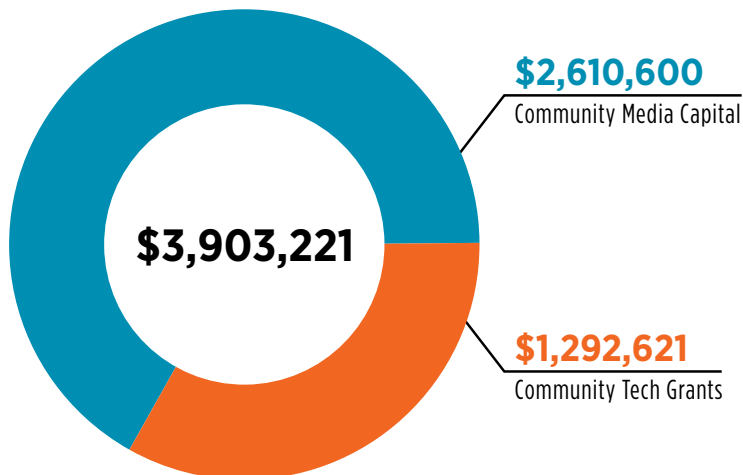
MHCRC Operating Budget

Revenues	Budget	Actual
City of Portland Appropriations	\$344,396	\$344,396
East County Appropriations	\$185,144	\$185,444
FY 21-22 Carryover	\$161,000	\$117,362
Interest Revenue Allocation	\$92,586	\$136,225
Fund Compliance Admin	\$647,369	\$407,193
Total Revenues	\$1,430,796	\$1,190,620

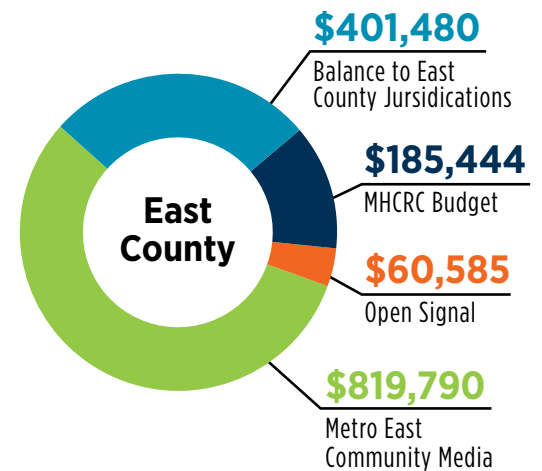
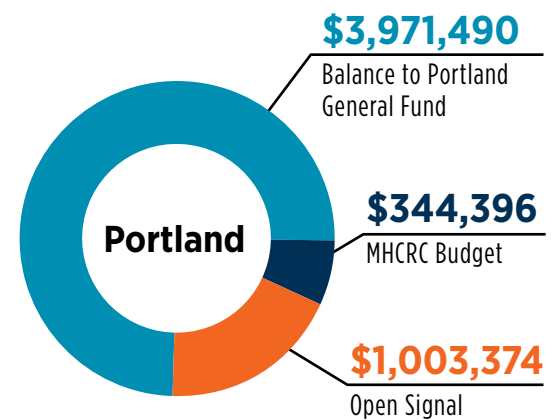
Expenditures	Budget	Actual
Personnel Services	\$615,544	\$482,333
Professional Services	\$205,078	\$150,875
External Materials & Services	\$207,860	\$18,405
MHCRC Fund Audit	\$15,300	\$14,490
Internal Materials & Services	\$86,827	\$38,319
General Fund Overhead	\$25,000	\$0
Contingency	\$114,186	\$0
Encumbrance carryover	\$161,000	\$161,000
Total Expenditures	\$1,430,795	\$865,422

Year-end Balance	\$0	\$325,198
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Funding Support for Community Media & Grants (based on PEG Funds)

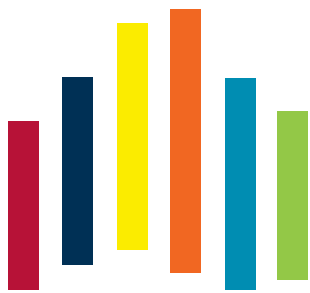


Franchise Fee Disbursement



\$4,372,970
Franchise Fee Disbursement

7.8% of franchise fees spent on MHCRC Operations



MHCRC

*Serving Multnomah County and the Cities of
Fairview, Gresham, Portland, Troutdale & Wood Village*

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This report produced by MHCRC staff and the City of Portland.



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Traducción e Interpretación | Biên Dịch và Thông Dịch | अनुवादन तथा व्याख्या | 口笔译服务 |
Устный и письменный перевод | Turjumaad iyo Fasiraad | Письмовий і усний переклад |
Traducere și interpretariat | Chiaku me Awewen Kapas | 翻訳または通訳 | ການແປພາສາ ຫຼື
ການອະທິບາຍ | الترجمة التحريرية أو الشفهية | www.portland.gov/bps/accommodation or **311**