

Oregon Nonprofits Receive Civics Education Grants to Boost Public Engagement



By [Zev Glass](#) March 15, 2025



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SALEM, OR – Ask the average Oregonian how a bill becomes law, and you might get a blank stare. That’s a problem the **Oregon State Capitol Foundation (OSCF)** is working to fix. This year, through its **Civics Education Initiative (CEI)**, the foundation is awarding grants to **nine nonprofit organizations** that aim to make government more accessible and public engagement less of an afterthought.

At its core, the program is about getting people to pay attention—not just during election cycles, but year-round. The funding will support projects that introduce students and adults to **Oregon’s legislative process, state budgeting, and the role of citizens in shaping policy.**

“The awards will provide hands-on experiences for students and other Oregonians to learn how democratic governments make decisions and—most importantly—how to be an effective participant,” said Gary Wilhelms, chair of the Oregon State Capitol Foundation.

Making Government Less of a Mystery

Understanding government should be simple, but it’s often anything but. That’s why these grants target **classroom education, extracurricular activities, and hands-on experiences**—things that make government real instead of abstract.

Some of the funded programs will:

- **Expand civics courses** in schools, giving students a clearer picture of how laws are made.
- **Fund travel for school groups** to visit the state Capitol, so they can see policy in action.
- **Support mock legislative sessions**, where students take on the roles of lawmakers and debate real issues.
- **Develop new exhibits and digital content** explaining how state and local government function.

None of this is theoretical. A stronger civics education program means **a better-informed electorate**, and that has ripple effects across every aspect of life in Oregon.

Who's Getting the Funding?

This year's **Civics Education Initiative grants**—totaling nearly **\$120,000**—have been awarded to **nine nonprofits** across the state. These organizations will use the funding to promote civic education through a variety of programs, from simulated legislative sessions to training on effective citizen participation.

The 2025 recipients are:

- Boys and Girls Club of Salem, Marion, and Polk Counties
- Civics Learning Project
- East County Rising Community Projects
- Foundations for a Better Oregon
- Oregon Alliance of Boys and Girls Clubs
- Oregon Boys State
- PSU Center for Women's Leadership
- YMCA Youth and Government
- Young Leaders Program

These grants will **support programs that engage students in real-world civic experiences**, including a summer leadership camp, state Capitol visits for college students from urban and rural areas, and after-school programs focused on constitutional issues.

Why This Matters to Business Owners

While this initiative is focused on students and the general public, **Oregon's business community has just as much at stake**. When voters don't understand how policy decisions are made, businesses bear the brunt of uncertainty.

A tax proposal, a housing bill, or an infrastructure project can stall—or pass—because of **a lack of informed public debate**. Civics education helps create a more predictable and engaged electorate, something every industry benefits from.

A Long-Term Strategy for Oregon

Fixing civic disengagement isn't a quick process. It takes investment, time, and a shift in how we think about public involvement. The **Oregon State Capitol Foundation** is making a bet that **early exposure to government leads to lifelong engagement.**

“The Oregon State Capitol Foundation is proud to sponsor civics education efforts underway throughout our state,” Wilhelms said. **“We look forward to growing the Civics Education Initiative because we know there is no substitute for voters who understand how governments work and how to make their voices heard.”**

That kind of awareness doesn't happen overnight, but it **lays the groundwork for stronger civic participation in Oregon's future.**

For now, nine organizations have the funds to push the mission forward. The real test will be whether Oregon's next generation sees government as something they **watch from the sidelines—or something they actively shape.**



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