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# VertueLab Awards two \$25k Community Capacity Grants for Climate Solution Deployment Projects in Oregon Frontline Communities

*From a pool of exciting proposals from community-based organizations across the state, VertueLab has selected two communities to receive cash to support organizational capacity along with in-kind support to improve access to funding and innovative technology.*

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**PORTLAND, Ore.** – VertueLab, a Pacific Northwest-based nonprofit addressing the causes and impacts of the climate crisis through funding and support of climate tech innovation, announced today that they will be awarding \$25K grants each to two frontline communities<sup>1</sup> in Oregon in support of their planned climate tech deployments.

Because frontline communities are hit first and worst by the climate crisis, VertueLab's strategy calls for the communities to be a part of the solutions to the crisis. This participation is critical to ensure not only that the solutions are real and relevant to their community's needs, but also that community members have the opportunity for wealth creation through the booming of the climate economy. One of the strategies to achieve this outcome is their Community Capacity Grants for Climate Solution Deployment Projects.



disproportionately impacted by the climate crisis and support community-driven projects deploying climate tech solutions that address the causes and impacts of the climate crisis. “The impacts of the climate crisis are not off in the future,” said Benjamín Roldan, Community Engagement Manager at VertueLab. “They are being experienced today, here in Oregon, and in particular by our communities on the frontline that, due to historical marginalization, have not been resourced to be resilient in the face of drought, fire, flooding, or poor air or water quality.”

The community-based organizations (CBOs) selected for awards will be partnered with VertueLab staff to support the success of their climate action projects. In addition to the financial support of the capacity grant, VertueLab will bring, through community-centered practice, their knowledge and network in the climate tech sector to support the selection and deployment of innovative technologies that meet the identified needs of the community.

VertueLab’s frontline impact program team was thrilled to receive the high volume of applications and expressed gratitude to all



the state highlighting the impact of the climate crisis and historic inequities on Oregon's Frontline Communities, all of which were worthy in one way or another of support. VertueLab selected two projects for the cash award, and is offering to provide their in-kind support where it can be helpful to all of the eligible applicants, even those not selected for cash awards.

The two organizations to receive these grants are as follows:

**Warm Springs Community Action Team,**  
**<https://wscat.org>**

The pioneering Commissary Building project, the first of its kind in Oregon and one of few in Indian Country, is converting an abandoned 19th century Bureau of Indian Affairs building on the Warm Springs reservation into a 21st century incubator for new businesses run by Tribal members. The project will be a showcase for Tribal economic development and sustainability efforts, including completely remodeling the building to make it net zero energy. As part of the process, the building will be powered by new and innovative solar tracking technology, and will include batteries, making it a resiliency hub for the Warm Springs community.



provides a clear example of how indigenous leaders and communities have always been at the helm of environmental stewardship and must be equipped with the resources to continue to do so. This project is a clear example of net zero energy driving resilience.”

Chris Watson, Executive Director of Warm Springs Community Action Team said, “This funding will enable the Warm Springs Community Action Team to purchase the battery connected to the Commissary, which will provide resilience in times of outage, and will support financing and final development work by the Oregon Clean Power Cooperative, our project partner since 2021. The Commissary site will include a small business incubator with retail and office space, a food cart pod, and commercial kitchen, all of which we intend to power using solar energy. The Commissary project will provide the community with a genuine place and space for business, inspire tribal and community members to envision an alternative energy future, and enable us to live and work in an environmentally sustainable way, in line with Seven Generations thinking.”

**Beyond Toxics, <https://www.beyondtoxics.org>**



Bethel community, an environmental justice community in West Eugene, in decision-making that affects their health and property. This is a community-centered project involving a coalition of community members, the City of Eugene and state regulators to implement a community climate smart benefit project in the form of residential access to solar energy or electric heat pumps. Outcomes include reduced exposure to air pollution, lowered risk of asthma and other respiratory diseases, overcoming barriers to the public's engagement climate pollution reductions, and advancing the community's valuable knowledge from their own experience living in the shadow of large polluters. Grant funds will support community outreach activities including a series of strategy and visioning meetings, door-to-door canvassing, engagement activities and working with at least 10-15 residents receiving clean energy solutions in the form of electrification.

The VertueLab Selection Committee commented that, "Beyond Toxics makes a case for how climate solutions must build on a foundation of environmental justice precepts and, in doing so, provides a concise articulation of the issues and outcomes where community-



Lisa Arkin, Executive Director of Beyond Toxics shared that, “This unique grant will propel Beyond Toxics towards the goal of our project, which is to save money and energy, build climate resilience and improve the health of the environment and the people of Bethel, a working-class environmental justice community in West Eugene.”

VertueLab selected these organizations because they demonstrated a high potential for catalytic impact with their proposed projects deploying innovative clean technology in distinct frontline communities in Oregon with clearly identified climate resiliency needs. Each organization exhibits a high degree of community involvement in their decision-making and planning, which VertueLab knows to be a critical factor in successful adoption.

Jo Brickman, Deputy Director & Director of Impact Strategy, VertueLab said, “VertueLab has been humbled to better learn the extent of the capacity gap that exists and also by the will of communities to seek climate and energy justice. We are honored to have the opportunity to partner with the communities of Warm Springs



VertueLab's Selection Committee played an essential role in reviewing proposals and guiding the project selection. The Selection Committee included members of the VertueLab Board of Directors and climate community:

- Maurice Rahming, O'Neill Electric and VertueLab Board
- Dennis Wilde, VertueLab Board
- Joe Connors, Columbia Bank and VertueLab Board
- William J Barber III, Rural Beacon Initiative, Climate Reality Project, and Coalition for Green Capital
- Steven Nakana, PhD, PGE
- Chabre Vickers, Prosper Portland

The members of the VertueLab Selection Committee reflected that, "the applicants were all worthy candidates. We were impressed by the quality of the applications, the targeted impact that each organization connected to its mission, and the sustained commitment to elevating the quality of life for the interested parties served. Each project was an inspiring





organizations gain resources, access, and funds that otherwise would go without.”

Funding for these grants was provided by Business Oregon and the Oregon Innovation Council through its ongoing support of VertueLab’s mission. VertueLab sees this first round of grants as a pilot, and the frontline impact team hopes to apply valuable lessons from these two projects to improve the program. It seeks interested funders to help it expand the program in the future so that it is available throughout the Pacific Northwest.

<sup>1</sup> *Frontline communities are those that experience continuing injustice – including people of color, immigrants, people with lower incomes, those in rural areas, and indigenous people—that face a legacy of systemic, largely racialized, inequity that influences their living and working places, the quality of their air and water, and their economic opportunities.*

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**About VertueLab** <http://vertuelab.org>

*Since 2007, VertueLab has funded and supported cleantech startups focused on accelerating the innovations needed to fight the climate crisis. VertueLab is a nonprofit on a mission to unleash innovation and entrepreneurship that will solve environmental challenges and catalyze shared economic prosperity. This is accomplished by making catalytic investments through our Climate Impact Fund, connecting promising companies with state and federal resources, preparing these companies for follow-on investments, and providing holistic entrepreneurial support. Learn more at [VertueLab.org](http://VertueLab.org) or [@vertuelab](https://twitter.com/vertuelab).*

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