

Program offers funds for leaders

By T. Lee Brown
Correspondent

The twenty-somethings and teenagers of Sisters are eligible to apply for the 2020-2021 Rural Organizing Fellowship. The fellowship supports Oregonians between the ages of 16 and 30 working toward positive change and justice in their small-town, rural, and frontier communities.

Youth may apply for the fellowship, or others may nominate them. Applications are due January 31.

The Rural Organizing Project (ROP) states that some of the most powerful work being done in rural and small-town areas is often based on volunteering — and may not be called “organizing” by local groups. In other words, you may already be an organizer and not even know it.

Organizing is “collaborating with others to take action and make positive changes for your community,” Fellowship Coordinator Hannah Harrod told *The Nugget*. For example, an organizer might coordinate a community garden, walk out of school for a cause, put on a show, or participate in a school club.

This year’s fellowship will bring together 15 emerging leaders from around Oregon for skill-building, studying social justice history, and exploring organizing opportunities throughout the state and at home. Fellows will gather at four weekend-long retreats and monthly video calls where they can share strategies, do in-depth trainings, and learn

about strategic rural organizing over the long term.

To support fellows’ full participation, ROP will cover their travel, childcare, and interpretation expenses. A wage-replacement stipend of \$150 is offered for each retreat.

Ideal candidates enjoy meeting new people and building new relationships. They are well-organized “self-starters” who can work independently. Young people who currently live in a city but are ready to move back home to rural Oregon this spring are also welcome. Harrod noted, “We encourage folks of all identities to apply!”

Fellowship recipients will network with ROP’s human dignity groups and attend the 2020 Rural Caucus and Strategy Session, meeting with “leaders working for progressive change across the state of Oregon.” A cohort of emerging organizers is expected to emerge.

Retreats will be hosted at accessible community spaces and campgrounds. ROP will provide camping gear and bedding as needed.

At the eastern edge of Sisters Country in the town of Culver, high school student Maria Mejia-Botero won a fellowship last year.

A part-time lifeguard, she was active with the Let’s Talk Diversity Coalition and co-founded a group at Culver High School called the Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA). During her junior year, she organized a walkout for school safety.

“I’ve been living in Culver in Jefferson County for almost 12 years,” Mejia-Botero wrote. “I love how we frequently get stunning sunsets over the Cascade mountains and how the sky is large with millions of stars. Culver is unique for having a large Latinx community despite its small population.”

Coming from a family of immigrants, Mejia-Botero has personally seen that “although this country is full of opportunities, not everybody has an equal access to opportunities. Socioeconomic status, access

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Waterston Desert Writing Prize open for 2020 submissions

The Waterston Desert Writing Prize 2020 is now open for submissions. Applicants must submit online through April 1.

The prize, now in its sixth year, honors creative non-fiction that illustrates artistic excellence, sensitivity to place, and desert literacy, with the desert as both subject and setting. Inspired by author and poet Ellen Waterston’s love of the high desert of Central Oregon, a region that has been her muse for over 30 years, the Prize recognizes the vital role deserts play worldwide in the ecosystem and the human narrative.

Submission guidelines and a link to submit are available at www.waterstondesertwritingprize.org. The prize-winner will receive a \$2,500 cash award, a reading and reception at the High Desert

Museum on June 24 in Bend, Oregon, and a residency at PLAYA at Summer Lake, Oregon.

The prize is funded from an endowment managed by the Oregon Community Foundation, with the impetus for the creation of the endowment provided by actor Sam Waterston, after whom the prize is named. As the endowment for the prize grows, so will the annual prize amount. Tax-deductible donations can be made online or via check to the Waterston Desert Writing Prize, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, and mailed to PO Box 640, Bend, Oregon 97709.

For more information about the Waterston Desert Writing Prize, visit www.waterstondesertwritingprize.org, email info@waterstondesertwritingprize.org or call 541-480-3933.



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