



Puget Sound Sage

# Deep democracy rooted in people power

2020  
IMPACT  
REPORT



## OUR MISSION

**Puget Sound Sage charts a path to a living economy in the South Salish Sea and Duwamish River Valley regions by developing community power to influence, lead and govern.**

## OUR VISION

**We envision a living economy where Black, Indigenous and People of Color workers, families and communities thrive and where we live in sustainable relationship with our land.**



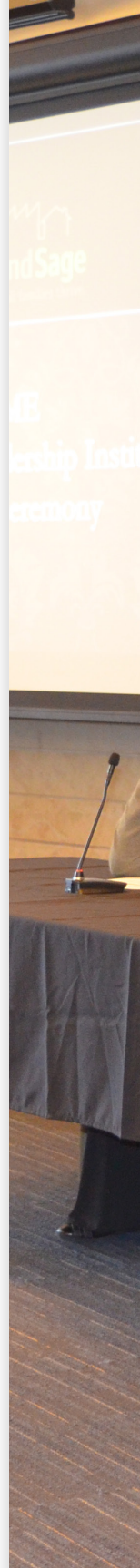
We define a **Living Economy** as an environment where natural resources are renewable and people's labor is cooperative and all of the things a community needs are controlled and governed by everyday people: like housing, schools, farms and food production, local governance structures, art and culture, healthcare and healing, and transportation[1].

[1] Thanks, and credit to the New Economy Coalition for their definition of a solidarity economic ecological systems that informs our definitions. <https://neweconomy.net/>

# Re-shaping who holds the tools, resources & power to build our neighborhoods

Systems will work for communities, when our communities own and govern them – that’s the crux of our strategy. In 2020, this looked like:

- Winning \$200M for both Seattle’s Equitable Development Initiative and the Green New Deal
- Developing new models for land stewardship with local BIPOC-led organizations through our Community Real Estate Stewardship and Graham Street Community Action Teams
- Keeping Washington families connected to utilities by winning five extensions of utility shut-off moratoriums and a debt erasure program for low-income households served by Washington’s energy investor-owned utilities.





# Keeping Washington's families connected to power throughout COVID-19

In 2020, we published *Powering the Transition: Community Priorities for a Renewable and Equitable Future*, the culmination of a year of community-based participatory research about our community's energy policy priorities. Among the key findings: we must meet the urgent need for low-income energy bill assistance and ensure all people have the right to access water, power, and telecommunications.

Upon completing our research, the COVID-19 pandemic shut down Washington State. We jumped into action, immediately pivoting to mobilize a statewide utility campaign to keep our communities connected to power through the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic and through economic recovery.

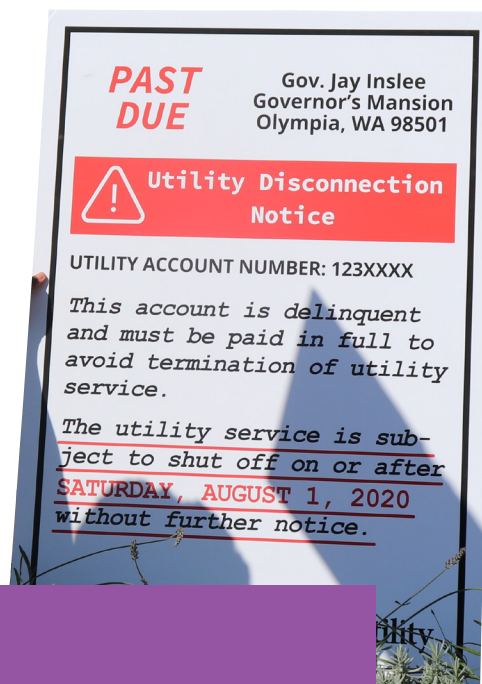
## **Led a statewide campaign to extend the moratorium on utility shut-offs until July 2021**

We successfully extended the statewide moratorium on utility shut-offs five times – each time requiring significant organizing, advocacy, and creative leadership in coalition. For example, on July 30, 2020 - two days before Governor Inslee's moratorium on utility shut-offs was due to expire - Puget Sound Sage, Sierra Club and 350 Seattle took to Olympia to deliver a poster-sized utility shut-off notice to the Governor's Mansion and demanded that the Governor keep households connected to basic utilities during the pandemic. Governor Inslee extended the moratorium the very next day.

## Secured a debt erasure program for low-income households served by Washington's for-profit utilities

Our research found that Washington's for-profit utilities including Puget Sound Energy made \$26.6 billion from energy-based activities, paid out at least \$395 million in dividends to shareholders, and paid their top executives at least \$51 million in compensation – all in 2019 alone. Through months of public pressure and organizing at the Utilities and Transportation Commission (UTC), our coalition won a debt erasure program for low-income households, a first step towards utilities paying their fair share of the economic cost of the pandemic.

Thinking long-term, in partnership with Front and Centered, we developed model state legislation that protects energy access and security for Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities and keeps low-income households and people with disabilities connected to energy.



### What we won:

- Extended the moratorium on utility shut-offs statewide until July 2021
- A debt-erasure program for low-income households served by Washington's for-profit utilities
- The moratoriums on utility shut-offs reduced Washington's COVID-19 death rates by 7.4% and infection rates by 4.4%. [2]

[2] [https://www.nber.org/system/files/working\\_papers/w28394/w28394.pdf](https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w28394/w28394.pdf)

# Securing long-term funding for community-driven development and the Green New Deal

## **We secured \$200M for both Seattle's Equitable Development Initiative and the Green New Deal through the passage of the JumpStart bill at the City of Seattle.**

Today Seattle, like much of the country, faces a collective crisis at the intersection of race, health, and wealth inequality. Corporations and individuals who created the structures driving climate change and economic exploitation have rigged the systems to accumulate and control the vast majority of the world's wealth and resources amongst themselves.

Our work started in 2015 when, in response to years of wide-scale displacement due to skyrocketing rents in Seattle, communities of color fought for the creation of Seattle's Equitable Development Initiative (EDI). Passed in 2016, the EDI funds community-driven development projects designed to create jobs, root communities in place, and fight displacement in gentrifying neighborhoods.

Around the same time, Puget Sound Sage saw the massive growth of the short-term rental industry in Seattle. Companies like Airbnb were removing huge numbers of long-term units from the local housing market, making it hard for low-income households to find affordable housing in the city. In 2017, working with local labor unions, partners, and SouthCORE, a Sage-led multi-racial coalition of community-based organizations in Southeast Seattle, Sage advocated for and won a tax on short-term rentals that funneled \$5-6 million a year to EDI projects.



This was an important start, but did not yet meet the community need for investment.

The SouthCORE coalition envisioned a progressive revenue model that would continuously fund equitable development in the long-term as the demand for EDI funding from local groups was enormous, hoping to drive BIPOC-led projects to develop cultural spaces, housing and other community anchors.

We changed the game when, in the summer of 2020, the coalition successfully advocated for dedicated funding for the Equitable Development Initiative as Seattle City Council passed the JumpStart bill and drafted a spending plan for the new revenue.

**Through constant pressure on Councilmembers by emails, calls, and public testimonies, the JumpStart spending plan passed on July 20th with dedicated funding for both the Equitable Development Initiative and the Green New Deal, each at \$20 million a year.**

Many City initiatives were put on hold as Seattle grappled with its massive budget shortfall. Winning continuous funding for equitable development and the Green New Deal ensures that our city is building an equitable future for communities of color throughout economic recovery and beyond.



**“Puget Sound Sage and SouthCORE  
has been especially important,  
and will continue to be my  
touchstone as we think about  
passing legislation that is  
equitable for communities of color.”**

—SEATTLE CITY COUNCILMEMBER TAMMY MORALES'  
CLOSING COMMENT ON JULY 20TH FULL COUNCIL VOTE



# Turning dreams of land stewardship into a collective reality

The transition to a living economy requires us to move land into community ownership and permanent affordability. We are developing new models for land stewardship driven by local BIPOC-led organizations through our Community Real Estate Stewardship and Graham Street Community Action Teams.

**Community Stewardship of Land transforms who decides on and benefits from land use and development.** It is a practice where communities permanently own or control land to holistically meet their housing, service, cultural, and recreational needs. Land stewards are driven by collective values and engage in democratic decision-making to care for the land. Indigenous teachings greatly influence this vision, where people maintain the land for the benefit of the community rather than treat it as a commodity to be sold off to the highest bidder.



Community Stewardship of Land is the core strategy to prevent displacement. It moves the focus of public policy and economic activity from an analysis of market dynamics to long-term resiliency and prosperity of communities of color.

We are building community capacity and resources for Community Stewardship of Land by:

**Advocating for the equitable distribution of Sound Transit surplus properties to develop affordable housing.** In 2019, we led a community engagement process with SouthCORE members to provide feedback to Sound Transit and Seattle’s Office of Housing on the strategy for achieving BIPOC-led community stewardship of properties in the Rainier Valley. In April 2021, the Sound Transit board voted to transfer 10 surplus properties to Seattle’s Office of Housing for permanent affordable homeownership.

**Leading the Graham Street Community Action Team:** In 2031, Sound Transit will open a light rail station in the Graham Street neighborhood. To combat displacement, the neighborhood gathered to create a shared community vision for their future. Seven community-based organizations formalized a place-based coalition supported by Sage called the Graham Street Community Action Team (CAT) to build long-term capacity and infrastructure that will make their vision a reality. Working with the CAT, we are creating a fundamental shift in the planning paradigm that includes creating the power and resources needed to drive development and investment ourselves.

**Convening BIPOC-led organizations driving development projects through the Community Real Estate Stewardship Team:** Launched in 2019, the Community Real Estate Stewardship Team (CREST) brings together 15-20 community-based organizations from King and Pierce County to learn together how to develop projects that provide space for and by BIPOC communities. In 2020, we built an expanded leadership team with Na’ah Illahee Fund and Multicultural Community Coalition and re-launched the cohort for a second year of learning and community building.

# Placing communities of color in local leadership

**Puget Sound Sage's Community Leadership Institute has become one of the most successful boards and commissions placement programs in the country specifically designed for leaders of color. We have graduated nearly 100 community leaders, 67% of whom are currently serving in civic leadership positions.**

Launched in 2015, our Community Leadership Institute is a six-month fellowship program that supports, trains and places emerging leaders from communities of color and low-income communities to sit on boards and commissions at the local, county, and state level.

The fellowship program is rooted in a values-based anti-racist curriculum, which trains emerging leaders in issues such as housing, climate, and economic justice. Fellows learn the nuts and bolts of local government processes, such as municipal budgeting, parliamentary procedures, and lawmaking, as well as advocacy, storytelling, and communication skills. After graduation, the fellows apply for and are placed on strategic boards, commissions, and task forces at the city, county, and state level. Graduates serve in a variety of leadership roles, including the City of Seattle Environmental Justice Committee, King County Children and Youth Advisory Board, Tacoma Human Rights Commission and Renton-Kent-Auburn Area Mobility Board.

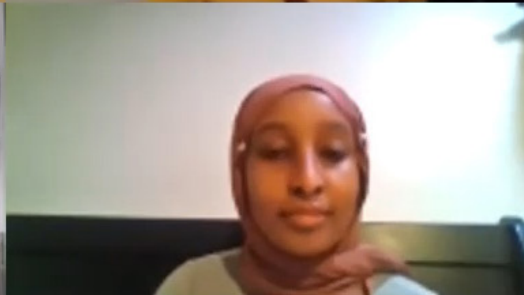
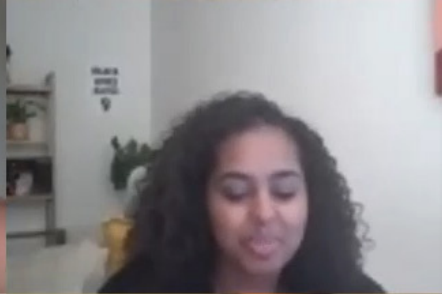
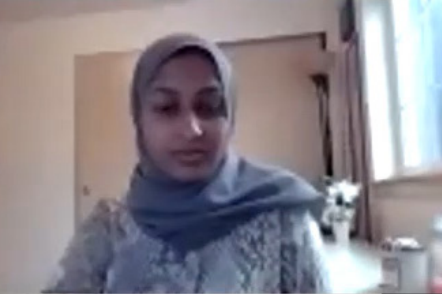
Within these strategic placements, fellows not only serve as the voices of their communities, but also bring the lens of racial and social equity inside spaces of power and decision-making tables.

**The Community Leadership Institute is rooted in a peer cohort model, which continues after graduation through the CLI Alumni Network to ensure continued strategy and support in new roles.**

"We as people of color often do not see ourselves reflected in positions of power. Most of the time even before we are told no, we often self-exclude because we see people who are at the table don't look, sound, or have the same experiences like us, so we think it must not be for us. The CLI program has taught me that I have a rightful place in the decision-making, and has supported me throughout the process of getting into the commission I currently serve on."

Julio Sanchez graduated Puget Sound Sage's Community Leadership Institute in 2017 and currently serves on the board of Got Green and the Seattle Planning Commission. A long-time leader for economic, climate, and racial justice, Julio has been deeply involved with numerous grassroots organizations across the City of Seattle since moving here 24 years ago.







**“This has been by design that our communities are siloed and pitted against one another, and we cannot fight against oppression if we ourselves are not a collective. In the CLI, I learned about the interconnectedness of the issues we all face, and only by learning from one another can we fight for transformative change together.”**

Diana Parra migrated to the United States from Colombia 8 years ago. Since then, she's worked as a victim advocate and now as a financial counselor for immigrants and refugees. Diana graduated Puget Sound Sage's Community Leadership Institute in 2019 and currently serves on the Community Safety Committee and Language Access Committee at the Commission on Immigrant and Refugee Affairs for the City of Tacoma.

# Standing with Black leaders' demands for real community health and safety

*Climate change and police violence are manifestations of the same oppressive economic system. In the theft of Indigenous land and the enslavement of Black people for corporate greed, power structures were created to criminalize Black and Indigenous people and justify the extraction of their labor, land and resources in the name of profit.*

The murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020 sparked anger across our country. People demanded justice and took to the streets to protest anti-Black racism and police brutality. The moment demanded all of us to face the questions Black leaders and organizers have raised for generations—*what does true community safety look like, and how can we transform our neighborhoods into places where everyone, regardless of race, income, or ability, can live safely?*

The movement to defund the police and reinvest in community gained momentum in Seattle, as it did across the country. During the 2020 city budget re-negotiations, Puget Sound Sage stood in solidarity and followed the lead of Black-led organizations, Decriminalize Seattle and King County Equity Now, in their movement to defund the Seattle Police Department by at least 50% and reallocate the funds towards community-led health, safety and resilience strategies.

When Mayor Durkan promised \$100 million to Black communities, we knew that the money would not come from the Seattle Police Department but instead from JumpStart, the progressive tax revenue already allocated for communities of color. In response, we joined the Solidarity Budget coalition and signed a joint statement alongside many BIPOC-led organizations, saying that we will not be pitted against one another.



As currently a non-Black led organization committed to advancing Black Liberation, we believe that the city must make investments in healthy communities rather than policing; investing in Black land ownership, housing that's affordable, living wage green jobs, access to healthy food, clean air and water, energy democracy, restorative justice, and community-based safety strategies. Budgets are moral documents, and the movement to Defund SPD is about much more than dollars. It's also about demilitarizing the police, increasing accountability over SPD, and ultimately advancing Black liberation through a fundamental shift of public safety to culturally responsive, community-centered alternatives to policing.

**Puget Sound Sage will continue to stand with Black organizers in this fight.** We view the issue of police violence as inextricable to our work towards a living economy, where communities are the stewards of their resources, and infrastructures such as healthcare, governance and safety is defined by everyday people living in the community.

Our racial equity commitments:

## Puget Sound Sage understands that the liberation of all people is inextricably tied to the liberation of Black and Indigenous peoples.

**Black Liberation** is the restoration of the health, economic, social, spiritual wellbeing, and dignity of Black people as fully human. Achieving such liberation of Black people demands addressing both systemic and non-systemic barriers that continuously impede the wellbeing of Black people within and outside of Sage.

**Indigenous Solidarity:** Here on Turtle Island (North America), our society is built upon a foundation of settler colonialism that causes ongoing harm. Sage commits to the struggle against settler-colonialism by supporting Indigenous self-determination nationally and locally.

As a multiracial organization currently led by non-Indigenous people, we position ourselves in solidarity with Indigenous communities. We commit to supporting Indigenous leadership and organizations, and continuing our own education to be responsible partners and community members with Indigenous peoples, especially those whose land we occupy and organize in: the Duwamish and other Coast Salish Tribes, and urban Indian communities.

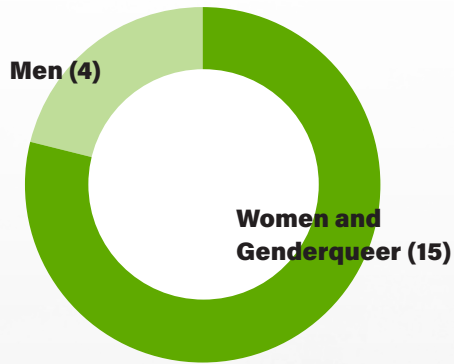
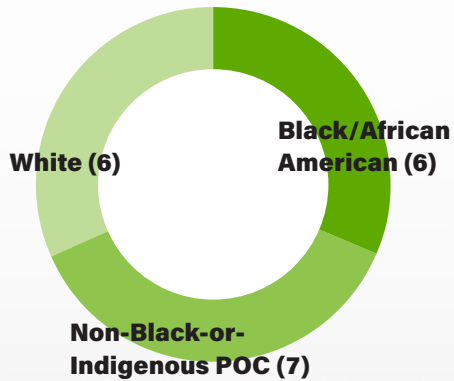


# sageleaders

## Launching Sage Leaders

In 2020, Sage Leaders formed as a 501(c)4 affiliated with Puget Sound Sage. Sage Leaders' mission is to cultivate deep democracy in Washington state by developing Black, Indigenous and People of Color community leaders for civic and elected leadership. Learn more at [www.sageleaders.org](http://www.sageleaders.org).

# Staff demographics



**Minimum: \$54,080**

**Median: \$64,931**

**Maximum: \$85,000**

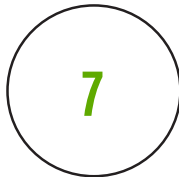
**Staff Salaries**



# 2020 by the numbers



**Full-time Staff**



**Board Members**



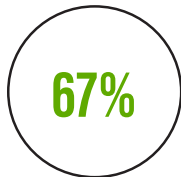
**Budget**



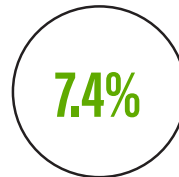
**Secured annual funding for 10 years, for both the Equitable Development Initiative and the Green New Deal**



**Given through sub-grants, participant stipends, and honorariums**

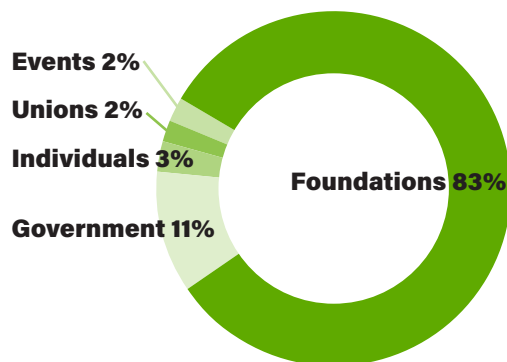


**CLI alumni currently serving on boards and commissions**

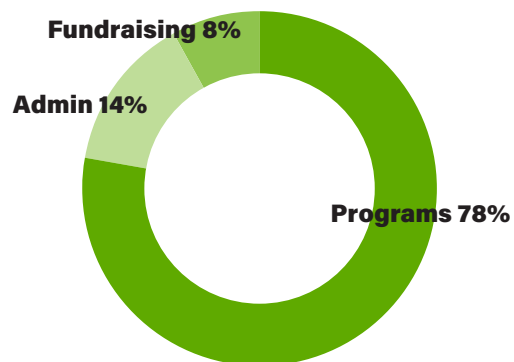


**Reduced COVID-19 death rates by 7.4% and infection rates by 4.4% due to the utility shut-off moratorium [3]**

## Revenue by Source



## Expenses by Function



[3] Research from NBER [https://www.nber.org/system/files/working\\_papers/w28394/w28394.pdf](https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w28394/w28394.pdf)



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