



Transitioning Beyond Mi Valle Mi Hogar

Learnings and Appreciations

The MVMH board has decided to wind down the project. Below explains how and why, along with acknowledgments and lessons learned.

June 4th, 2021

Introduction – Closing MVMH’s work

My Valley My Home (Mi Valle Mi Hogar – MVMH) was born in the aftermath of the Alameda fire. Within weeks of its genesis, many parts of fire relief, recovery and rebuild planning efforts had been organized into what has been a six-month effort by leadership, staff and supporting community members to be in service to the Latinx community impacted by the Alameda fire.

After careful consideration, the board of MVMH (the majority of whom are white and not directly impacted by the fires), have decided to conclude the operations of the organization. Over the coming months, MVMH plans to disperse its resources to [Coalición Fortaleza](#) – a Latinx-led, inter-generational coalition of community members, leaders, volunteers, and organizations in the Rogue Valley who are deeply rooted in the community, committed and focused on long term disaster resiliency and recovery, and are seeking to create a solidarity economy for fire-affected Latinx families.

This decision was reached after trying several experiments in organization, projects and outreach. While much work was accomplished, MVMH has been unable to ground itself in, and build relationships with, the Latinx community. This is mostly due to the lack of existing relationships with the local Latinx community, along with mistakes made from a place of

unconscious, internalized white supremacy within the MVMH leadership. The difficulty of building such relationships during times of trauma presented a great challenge as well.

We recognize that in trying to come with solutions and build something new, MVMH neglected to truly support an existing local community. We acknowledge and sincerely apologize for the harm, confusion and stress that our missteps caused in the local Latinx community, especially in light of MVMH's primary goals to center equity and healing in recovery efforts.

We feel it is important to recognize the immense stress, grief and overwhelm that the various hardships of these fires have caused, both directly and indirectly. Though our intention was to support and alleviate some of these stresses, the impact did not always match that intention.

The leadership and staff have decided the most equitable way forward is to listen to the community, distribute our remaining resources to other organizations serving similar missions, and to continue to support the efforts these organizations are providing for the fire-affected Latinx community.

We thank those in the community that have offered support, ideas, and reflections on the work of MVMH. We also hope that our reflections may provide helpful insights for other white-led organizations seeking to support culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

History of My Valley My Home/Mi Valle Mi Hogar

Initially called the 'Rogue Valley Home and Shelter Relief' project, MVMH was formed in the weeks following the Alameda Fire by members of the spontaneous "bike brigade" and others who believed there was a need to slow down and consider the equity and sustainability dimensions of rebuilding efforts. A parallel venture, the 'Rogue Volunteer Initiative', that was mostly focused on short-term relief, then became a part of the organization and was given support and space inside the structure of MVMH to continue efforts in mutual aid.

MVMH had a long-term mission to support up to 500 Latinx families displaced by the Alameda Fire in securing high quality, sustainable homes they own, in locations conducive to their personal and collective well-being. Our hope was to radically change the typical path of post-disaster home rebuilding in the valley by rooting it in equity, sustainability, and healing. In the months after the fire, MVMH focused its activities on six areas: Sitting at the Tables, Listening/Healing Circles, a Rebuild Resources Database, Mutual Aid Coordination, Collaboration Calls, and Community Communications.

MVMH also successfully fundraised, incorporated as a 501c(3) nonprofit, appointed a small board, and hired three, part-time employees for a three month experiment in the winter of 2020. The goal of this experimental investment was to make progress on the areas of focus and to engage more Latinx community members to join the organization at all levels (staff, board, and advisors/partners). As previously mentioned, it is clear from this experiment that MVMH failed to root itself in the Latinx community.

Activities and Resources

MVMH created connections between organizations, people, and government; documented and assembled resources; and assisted a number of groups with their specific work. We share the information below in case some of it may be helpful for other groups and ongoing efforts. Our work included:

- Developing a partnership with the [Rogue Volunteer Initiative](#)
- Assembling a list of community and government meetings and calls that we have attended, including notes from each of what was discussed/decided
- Helping the [Cascade Builders Association](#) incorporate
- Creating a resource database for rebuilding efforts, that was shared and expanded by the Local Innovation Lab, Jackson County Community Long-term Recovery Group, and other local organizations
- Sharing translation services with several local philanthropic and nonprofit organizations so they could provide their information in Spanish
- Funding and coordinating a Spanish Translation internship for two terms, through Local Innovation Works
- Developing a website and social media platform that shared community recovery events and resources
- Forwarding funding opportunities to several Latinx-led and/or Equity-focused organizations, including Unete, Southern Oregon Education Service District, SO Equity, La Clinica, Long Term Secure Short Term (LTSST) Housing, and Northwest Seasonal Workers Association
- Providing contact information of Latinx-led community organizations to representatives from Housing Authority of Jackson County, Oregon Housing and Community Services, Jefferson Funders Forum, Nonprofit Association of Oregon, Douglas County School District, and Jackson County Community Long-term Recovery Group (JCC LTRG)

- Providing connections and support for community-based recovery efforts including JCC LTRG, Southern Oregon Wildfire Emergency Response Taskforce, Remake Talent, LTSST, and Local Innovation Works
- Fundraising over \$40,000

Financial summary

The [MRG Foundation](#) has been the fiscal sponsor for MVMH, and the [Post Growth Institute](#) (PGI), has been our fiscal agent to date. In other words, MRG has collected funds and dispersed them to MVMH and PGI has processed payroll for MVMH.

Here is a summary, as of June 4th, 2021, of our income, expenditures and cash balance:

Income:

Donations to MVMH via MRG Foundation	\$37,592.61
Donations to MVMH directly into Rogue Credit Union Account	\$6,685.61
Total income:	\$44,278.22

Expenditure:

Contractor payments	\$9,972.50
Contractor software	\$24.00
Credit card processing fees (MRG Foundation)	\$170.07
Fiscal agent costs (Post Growth Institute)	\$300
Translation	\$1,340
Website and domains	\$83.81
Incorporation/501c(3) fees	\$325
Total expenditure:	\$12,239.3

Balances:

Rogue Credit Union	\$5,640.3 0
MRG Foundation	\$26,422. 54
Net Balance:	\$32,062. 84

Learnings

- We allowed the felt sense of urgency, brought on both by the fires and by the effects of [white supremacy culture](#) on the way our team was operating, to blindside us to the consequences of our actions in trying to be of service.
- We should have initially focused on identifying, better understanding, and supporting the existing strengths of the affected Latinx community, especially from those on our team who were far removed from such an understanding. This would have required focusing on relationship-building for as long as it took, rather than springing into action.
- In focusing on relationship-building, we would have been able to gauge what community-led efforts were emerging to which we could offer support.
- White-bodied members of our team did not truly understand how our presence was experienced by affected community members due to our socialized tendency to deny negative impact.
- Through a colonized conditioning, we focused too much of our energy on exploring organizational formalities and achieving outcomes, rather than relationship-building and the questioning of our own assumptions with respect to impact.
- We did not create a mechanism for receiving feedback from the community we were aiming to serve, and this reinforced our incomplete understandings of our impact. If we had created this mechanism, we might have avoided making untrue assumptions about how the work was being received and about which actions were most important.
- An example of a false assumption MVMH made was asserting a connection with two Latinx based organizations on our website without getting explicit permission from

those organizations prior to doing so. That was wrong – rooted in our unfounded assumptions about the health of those relationships – causing harm and confusion.

- Compounding the error, in the apology letter for the above misstep, a white member of our team put the name of a Latinx member of our team, who was not responsible for the mistake, as the letter's lead signature. This tokenism caused deep confusion, negatively impacting the staff member's personal reputation.
- An impediment to MVMH's ability to build relationships among wildfire survivors is that white-bodied leaders and staff did not prioritize reducing barriers to participation within the MVMH team for wildfire survivors. For example, our meetings were too long, too frequent, and not scheduled around the working and recovery commitments of community members who were interested in joining.
- Members of the team who were not directly impacted by the fires did not take good enough care of those who bore the brunt of the impact.
- Our team relied too heavily on a singular member of the fire-affected Latinx community, thus adding to their personal stress and trauma.

Plans/Next steps

MVMH will formally conclude its operations, which may involve dissolving as an association and informing the IRS with respect to its 501c(3) status (unless the existing structure can be used by other Latinx-led fire recovery activities). We will post a notice about these actions to our Facebook page, before closing the page one month later. The MVMH website and email addresses will remain active until September 2021.

The Rogue Volunteer Initiative will continue as a privately-run, volunteer project, not linked to MVMH.

We will be distributing our remaining financial resources to the incredible team at [Coalición Fortaleza](#) – a Latinx-led, inter-generational coalition of community members, leaders, volunteers, and organizations in the Rogue Valley who are deeply rooted in the community, committed and focused on long term disaster resiliency and recovery, and are seeking to create a solidarity economy for fire-affected Latinx families.

Here in the Rogue Valley we are particularly lucky to have strong Xicana/Latinx leadership from women of a younger generation. These women have committed their lives to fighting exploitation, discrimination, environmental injustice, racism, poverty, and housing inequality, and their lived experience puts them in a unique and invaluable position to bring perspectives and leadership that no one else could. We recognize the immense value of this

leadership and feel grateful for the opportunity to work with representatives of Coalición Fortaleza, moving forward.

In Closing

It is always difficult to admit failure and own one's mistakes. Our ultimate lesson has been that good intentions and a stated goal of equity are not enough to earn the trust of the community, and this is rightfully so. MVMH has been blessed by the time and financial contributions of many people over these months from all over the Valley and beyond, and from all walks of life. We believe that dissolving the organization and making the resources available to others with a similar mission is the best way to ensure that those contributions continue to make a difference in the long term..

Thank you to the donors who pledged your belief in MVMH through your pocket books.

Thank you to the staff who did so much of the heavy lifting.

Thank you to the Latinx community members who invested their time and energy into the organization.

Thank you to the Latinx community members who gave us the gift of honest feedback, and let us know that we were going down the wrong path.

Thank you to the fire survivors who invested their time and energy into the organization while dealing with your own personal devastation and recovery.

Thank you to everyone who has been a part of this project at some point and in some capacity. Each of you has helped to make possible that which MVMH has been able to contribute.

The white members of MVMH thank the Latinx and Indigenous members of our team for their efforts to make us aware of our mistakes, and acknowledge that the missteps this letter lists are not theirs.

Sincerely,

Donnie Maclurcan, Teresa Cisneros, Alys Holden
MVMH Board Members