

Project Description:

The East Portland Community Phone project will bridge communication gaps and foster strong neighborhood relationships within East Portland through the deployment of an interactive public telephone art installation. Housed in a payphone, this installation will enhance community connections, provide essential services, and support the well-being of neighborhood residents by offering free access to communication tools and engaging the community in participatory art projects.

Hopefully the first of many in East Portland, the installation will join Futel's 17 other working installations in Portland and other cities, continuing Futel's continuous years of operation.

The installation will be located on the east side NE Brazee St north of NE 108th Ave, accessible from the sidewalk at all hours through the end of the grant period and for years afterward.

With the East Portland Community Phone project, we aim to help build a more connected, resilient, and creative community, addressing both immediate communication needs and long-term social engagement goals within EPAP's operational framework.

Activities and Timeline:

- Before April 2024: Independent of the project, ongoing larger Futel project operates, including outreach and development of IT and network.
- May 1-7 2024: Site planning with host, estimate time and materials.
- May 8-31 2024: Purchase hardware and materials, configure IT, finalize site planning. Deploy installation.
- June 2024-April 2025: Site is operational. Maintain, repair, and operate site and larger network of installations.
- After April 2025: Independent of the project, ongoing larger Futel project operates, including outreach and development of IT and network.

Needs Assessment:

Limited Access to Communication Services: Many East Portland residents, particularly among vulnerable populations such as low-income families and those without stable housing, face barriers to accessing reliable communication services. This gap not only affects their ability to connect with family and community resources but also hinders their participation in civic life.

Need for Creative and Inclusive Community Spaces: Many parts of East Portland lack sufficient creative outlets and public spaces which are welcoming to all community members and have very low accessibility barriers.

The East Portland Community Phone project will serve as both a practical tool for essential communication and a catalyst for community engagement and creative expression.

Impact:

While we don't collect demographic information from users of Futel phones, our observations and the feedback we've received show that people with low incomes or experiencing houselessness are frequent users. The project inherently bridges gaps in access and opportunity for the communities hosting the installations. The very low barrier to utilization and pedestrian oriented design removes economic and social obstacles to their use, promotes inclusivity, and fosters neighborhood connection and resiliency.

Specific impacts include:

- **Accessibility to Communication:** For individuals facing economic hardships and the unhoused population, access to free communication tools is a necessity. A

Futel installation provides access to a basic and essential communication tool for accessing services and for simply communicating with other people. Our focus on basic telephone communication addresses the crucial first step that many people need to communicate, either temporarily or for longer periods.

- Inclusive Community Engagement: As a pedestrian-oriented example of urban furniture, the Futel installation will foster a sense of belonging and neighborhood equity.

- Creative Interaction: The interactive audio projects accessed with the Futel installation will help neighborhood members tell their stories and strengthen relationships.

- Strengthening Community Resilience: In the face of challenges, a connected community is a resilient community. The Futel installation will enhance the support within the community.

Equity:

Services and content are provided in Spanish and English.

Recognizing the importance of ongoing dialogue and responsiveness to community needs, our project includes mechanisms for feedback and engagement from all participants. This feedback informs our continuous effort to improve accessibility and inclusivity, ensuring our installations serve as equitable, patron-informed platforms for expression and connection. Feedback mechanisms include metrics of usage, prompts for the user to evaluate the service and describe how it could better serve the community, and live human interaction with Futel operators at the touch of a button.

Our project design and execution are guided by the need to provide equitable access to communication services, creative opportunities, and the expression of experiences and culture.

Further information about Futel:

Previous partners have included Street Roots, Open Signal, Village Coalition, and PDX Hackerspace.

A map of our current installations is at <https://futel.net/map/>

Selected media coverage:

"Futel utilizes forgotten payphones with free calls for anyone", Street Roots article, February 7, 2024

<https://www.streetroots.org/news/2024/02/07/futel-upcycles-pay-phones-free-calls>

"'Still needed': Free phone service sees continued use amid pandemic", KOIN 6 News article, February 27, 2021

<https://www.koin.com/news/special-reports/still-needed-free-phone-service-sees-continued-use-amid-pandemic/>

"A Portland Software Engineer Is Bringing the Pay Phone Back, Minus the "Pay" Part". Willamette Week article, February 12, 2020

<https://www.wweek.com/culture/2020/02/12/a-portland-software-engineer-is-bringing-the-pay-phone-back-minus-the-pay-part/>

"A Pay Phone Revival, Without The Pay". NPR Morning Edition article, December 27, 2019

<https://www.npr.org/2019/12/27/791660745/a-pay-phone-revival-without-the-pay>