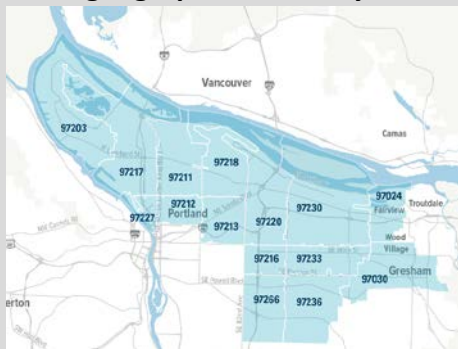


First Opportunity Target Area (FOTA): Clarify the program’s purpose to improve governance and administration

Why this audit is important

FOTA was designed to give eligible job applicants the first opportunity to apply for positions at the Oregon Convention Center. Positions at Portland’s Centers for the Arts, and Portland Expo Center were later added. Eligibility was based on household income and zip code.

FOTA geographic boundary



Source: Metro Website

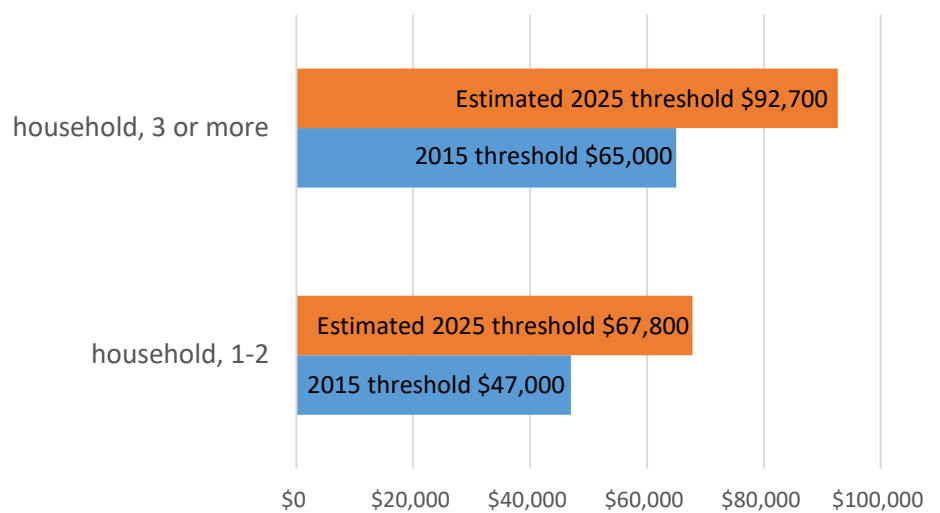
FOTA began in 1989 after Metro built the Oregon Convention Center in and near neighborhoods that had a history of displacement because of government-sponsored construction projects. These projects led to the demolition of businesses, churches, and homes. This especially impacted communities of color because racist housing policies restricted where they could live.

The purpose of this audit was to evaluate how administration of FOTA impacted program performance.

What we found

Management of FOTA was not aligned with the Metropolitan Exposition Recreation Commission’s (MERC) 2015 policy guidance and intended program outcomes were unclear. MERC required annual updates to the program’s income requirements and reviews of the zip code boundary every five years. FOTA requirements had not been updated for nearly ten years.

Updating income thresholds would make more people eligible for FOTA



Source: Auditor’s Office estimate of 2025 FOTA income thresholds based on University of Washington Self-Sufficiency Indices for 2014, 2017, 2021 and Metro website as of 8/15/24.

The audit also found performance data and reporting were unreliable. We did not locate reports about Metro’s implementation of FOTA in recent years and contractor reports did not appear to be based on program requirements. We evaluated the program using different interpretation of desired outcomes and found FOTA provided limited economic opportunities. Most positions filled were part-time and for event-based work. This reduced the earning potential and benefits for employees. Lastly, the audit found that weak relationships with community-based organizations (CBOs) limited FOTA recruitment. Our interviews with CBOs indicated additional efforts were needed for Metro to engage successfully.

What we recommend

The audit included six recommendations. Five were designed to clarify policy direction and improve program administration. One recommendation was made to ensure alignment between FOTA and other workforce diversity efforts.