

Project Name: Economic Recovery Team, Benton County Emergency Operations Center

Category: Outstanding Collaborative Partnership

Project Leads: Corvallis-Benton County Economic Development Office (EDO) & the Benton County Emergency Operations Center (EOC)

Location: Corvallis/Benton County

Partners: Corvallis Benton County EDO, City of Corvallis, Benton County, Visit Corvallis, Downtown Corvallis Association, Corvallis Chamber of Commerce, Philomath Chamber of Commerce, Corvallis Sustainability Coalition, Business Association of Monroe, Corvallis Business Network, Civic Outreach, Oregon RAIN, LBCC SBDC, Oregon Cascades-West Council of Governments, Corvallis Foundry, Business Oregon and the Oregon State University Advantage Accelerator

We are delighted to nominate and highlight the unique work of our Economic Recovery Team over the past year. When the pandemic and related Stay at Home orders hit Oregon in March of 2020, our Economic Development Office staff was called on to serve at the joint City/County Emergency Operations Center (EOC). The EOC is a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) structure in which there is a physical location and designated individuals that coordinate information and resources to support incident management activities related to a state or federal emergency. As part of this structure, a partnership between EDO staff and business support organizations was formed to establish the Economic Recovery Team. While it is not unusual for local government staff to serve in this capacity, it is unusual for there to be a specific and concerted effort toward including small business and economic development organizations. In fact, we understand Benton County was the *only* EOC in the entire state to do so. This was such an outside-the-box structure, our team was invited to present to the Oregon Emergency Management Association on how we had integrated the economic response work into the EOC structure.

In addition to providing staffing at the EOC, our Economic Development Manager served as the Operations Section Chief for the EOC from April through September. Holding this position allowed the needs of businesses to be incorporated and elevated in the response work and for more timely and accurate information to be pushed to businesses. The Economic Recovery Team, comprised of the partner organizations listed above, was in charge of collecting and disseminating information to the Benton County business community. The group met up to 3x a week, planning webinars, sharing information, creating content and connecting businesses to the resources they needed to survive amid the new and ever-changing guidelines. Without this vital group, many businesses may not have known about important programs such as Layoff Aversion Funds, PPP/EIDL notices, and free Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). The work of this group, our outreach and even structure of policies acknowledged the challenges faced by our minority-owned businesses and those hardest hit by the pandemic. To that end, we worked purposefully to create equity in our programs, such as structuring our county funds as a lottery even before other organizations had gone this route, creating materials in Spanish, and conducting online events in Spanish and English.

While the exact impact of the Economic Recovery Team on the Benton County business community is hard to quantify, the chart below identifies programming and resources we were able to execute:

Program/Resource	Description	Businesses Reached	Partners
Business Outreach	Email, Phone Calls, Drop-in contacts with businesses in Benton County	Typical year 150 business touches – over 1,600 business touches in the last year	All partners listed above
Let's Keep Connected Business Forums	Up to 3x a week business forum. Invited speakers included Senator Jeff Merkeley, Senator Sara Gelser, and Benton County Health Department officials	Approx. 1,320 attendees across 22 forums	All partners, with EDO, Corvallis Foundry, and LBCC SBDC as key leads
Latinx Online Forums	1x weekly business forum exclusively for Spanish speakers	Approx. 130 over 13 forums	All partners, with EDO, Corvallis Foundry, and LBCC SBDC as key leads
Business Right of Way Program	Business use of public parking spaces for commercial use (still operating and plans to be a seasonal program moving forward!)	15 businesses and thousands of patrons	EDO and DCA as key leads
Back to Business Videos	Videos highlighting unique and safe ways in which businesses began to reopen after the first shutdown	10 videos produced, hundreds of views	All partners, EDO as key lead
PPE	Distributed free PPE to businesses in Benton County through contactless pick-up events and delivery	6 pick-up events, hundreds of businesses helped, 10 pallets of PPE materials distributed	All partners

While not an EOC-FEMA official group anymore, the Economic Recovery Team continues to meet quarterly. We believe this unique partnership structure helped Benton County Businesses to stay connected to up-to-date information, and is a truly outstanding example of disparate organizations pulling together to achieve great results. As Albert Einstein said, *"through every difficulty lies opportunity,"* and through this immensely straining and challenging time, we were able to forge strong and lasting relationships with our partners and help the businesses of Benton County remain strong through this crisis.