

Oregon Economic Development Showcase

Nomination for “Excellence in Oregon Economic Development Awards”

Outstanding Collaborative Partnership Category

June 4, 2021

Washington County collaborated with its partners through-out the County in delivering a variety of programs to help sustain its small businesses, particularly businesses from traditionally under-represented communities, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021. This collaboration has served hundreds of businesses helping them to survive the lockdowns and other restrictions necessitated by the pandemic, and to also begin to position them for future success.

As the initial effects of the pandemic were felt in March, 2020, the County and many of its larger cities established grant and loan programs to provide emergency to small businesses. These funds were used to help businesses that had to close or severely curtail activity with funding to cover rent, utilities, payroll, and other necessary expenses. The County established a \$1M fund which was used to provide \$125,000 in small business grants (in partnership with MESO, Micro Enterprise Services of Oregon). The County supplemented its funds with contributions from Intel and NW Natural. The County also provided \$600K+ to leverage about \$1.8M in revolving loan fund programs run by MESO and Craft3.

These early efforts by the County and its larger cities, as substantial as they were, were done in relative isolation from each other. However, in late March, 2020, the U.S. Congress passed the CARES Act (“Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act), under which Washington County was allocated nearly \$105,000,000 of COVID relief funding (by dent of its population; the CARES Act entailed allocation to all U.S. States and Territories; it also allocated funds to cities and counties with populations of at least 500,000). While the lion’s share of these funds went to pay for healthcare, low income household rent relief, and other emergency relief projects, the County Board elected to allocate \$15M to economic recovery.

The County Board formed a Work Group, co-chaired by County Commissioners Pam Treece and Jerry Willey. The Work Group included dedicated County staff from the Administrative Office, County Counsel, Support Services, Government Relations, Communications, and Land Use and Transportation, which served to determine the wisest allocation of these dollars. This work was done in close consultation with Economic Development staff from the 13 cities of Washington County. The County had formed an “Economic Development Roundtable” prior to the COVID outbreak, and used this Roundtable to serve as a primary vehicle for the County to solicit City input as to the wisest deployment of these dollars.

After extensive consultations with the cities as well as its Chambers and CBOs, the County determined the following allocation of \$15M in CARES Act funds to assist our small business community:

- \$10M in small business grant program - \$7M of which was allocated to our cities, the remainder held back by the County for businesses in unincorporated portions of the County. The County left it to the cities to determine the criteria for their respective grant programs; the County's oversight was limited to assurance of compliance with relevant portions of the CARES Act.
- \$2.5M in reimbursement to cities which established their own locally-funded grant programs early in the pandemic as described above, i.e. prior to passage of the CARES Act.
- \$1.5M to fund a variety of workforce initiatives, in partnership with Work Systems Inc., Portland Community College, and Centro de Prosperidad.
- \$500K to set up 4 BRCs (Business Recovery Centers), geographically disbursed throughout the County (Hillsboro, Beaverton, Tualatin, and Adelante Mujeres/Forest Grove). These are one stop centers to serve small businesses with a full suite of FREE services – PPE, access to capital including local grants, technical assistance, business planning/coaching, legal counsel.
- \$500K for a variety of smaller programs focused primarily on restaurants and other hardest hit business sectors. Programs funded in this category included:
 - "Every Plate" program. Partnership with local non profits that provided free meals to low income folks, provided by area caterers, who were particularly hard hit by the pandemic.
 - BASRA (Bowling Alleys and Skating Rinks Assistance) program, which provided \$10,000 grants to these two categories of entertainment businesses which were restricted more than other business sectors by the Governor's Orders.
 - Utility Relief Program, leveraging funds from PGE and NW Natural, wherein 400+ companies impacted by COVID had their arrearages paid off completely.
- In addition to the \$15M in business funds, the County allocated \$4M to a childcare grant program and \$5.25M to a non-profit grant program. The County's Emergency Operations Center also ran a separate \$1.5M program for restaurants.
- In November, the County received another \$5.8M of CRF dollars from the State of Oregon, targeted on business assistance. As with earlier CRF funds, the County allocated the lion's share (about \$4M) of these funds to the cities to establish their own programs; the balance went either to businesses in unincorporated Washington County, as well as a special \$10K grant program for our hotels & motels (working with the Washington County Visitors' Association).
- In early 2021, we are wrapping up several projects and programs, some using CRF dollars and some using County General Fund. Including the following:
 - BRC funding through June, 2021 (funding partners include cities of Beaverton and Hillsboro, ColPac, and Intel, along with the County)
 - Reimbursement to those cities that were "over-subscribed" from last their grant round. I.e. some cities had more grant applications than funding.

The County Board of Commissioners and its staff are proud to have worked in close collaboration with its many strategic partners in delivering more than \$20M in funding to our small businesses throughout the County. We believe that our joint efforts serve as a great example of how the public, private, and non-profit sectors can effectively work together to better serve our business communities, particularly in difficult times such as what we have experienced this past year.