

HB 3104 - RURAL COMMUNITY RESOURCE CENTER

The Problem

Oregon's rural communities have struggled for decades to capitalize on community and economic opportunities, due to a lack of capacity. While their urban counterparts have larger tax bases that can support robust staff, often rural communities need to implement infrastructure projects, such as water and wastewater systems, with at best a bare bones staff. Oregon's rural communities often lack the ability to plan, access, and manage state or federal funding, philanthropic investments, or partnerships with the private sector. Around 35% of Oregonians live in rural or frontier jurisdictions. With about half of Oregon's cities under 10,000 in population, communities are unable to sustain the necessary basic staffing to develop projects; or seek and administer funding for needed community projects. At the same time, resources are available from the federal government to support needed projects; state resources are being allocated for targeted needs; and the philanthropic community is exploring new ways to help these underserved communities. **Despite a resource rich environment, rural communities are not able to seize these opportunities and will face even greater economic decline.**

The Solution

In order to address local capacity issues, the Rural Community Resource Center would support project managers and professional staff expertise in: public works, engineering, community development, land use planning, housing, transportation, public administration, and finance including auditing. These staff resources would be available to rural communities throughout the state to fill the gaps that exist today and position communities to prosper and seize opportunities that they otherwise could not access, given the lack of staff capacity. Depending on needs and partner input, these staff would be deployed around the state and located according to regional preference. This request includes specific funding for Economic Development Districts to assist jurisdictions in planning needed projects.

To accelerate on-the-ground action and leverage public, private, and civic resources, the Center's budget would include a Leverage Fund. The Fund would allow communities and regions to offer incentives for collaborative multi-sector work. The Fund would be deployed on a regional basis to ensure equitable distribution. The Rural Community Resource Center will be guided by a partnership consisting of leaders from the public, private and civic sectors. **The Rural Community Resource Center will bolster the capacity of and provide technical resources for rural communities, helping to break this cycle of disinvestment and disenfranchisement.**

