

Oregon Rural Needs Assessment: Assessing the Economic Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic



Photos courtesy of IPRE and Gary

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Final Report

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About the Institute for Policy Research and Engagement



The Institute for Policy Research & Engagement (IPRE) is a research center affiliated with the School of Planning, Public Policy, and Management at the University of Oregon. It is an interdisciplinary organization that assists Oregon communities by providing planning and technical assistance to help solve local issues and improve the quality of life for Oregon residents. The role of IPRE is to link the skills, expertise, and innovation of higher education with the transportation, economic development, and environmental needs of communities and regions in the State of Oregon, thereby providing service to Oregon and learning opportunities to the students involved.

About the Resource Assistance for Rural Environments

Resource Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE) is a unique AmeriCorps Program serving rural Oregon to strengthen communities, economies, food systems, and the natural environment. Housed at the University of Oregon's Institute for Policy Research & Engagement in the School of Planning, Public Policy, and Management, we aim to link the energy, expertise, and innovation of the University of Oregon with rural Oregon communities' most pressing needs.



RARE AmeriCorps' mission is to assist Oregon's natural resource-tied rural communities while providing supported, applied experience to college graduates from across the US.

RARE members live in rural communities for 11 months and serve cities, counties, non-governmental organizations, or state agencies to improve economic and environmental conditions in rural Oregon. Now in its 27th year, the RARE AmeriCorps Program has placed over 550 volunteers and served every Oregon County.

About the EDA University Center



The University of Oregon Economic Development Administration University Center (EDAUC) is a partnership between the Institute for Policy Research and Engagement, the UO Department of Economics, the Oregon Small Business Development Center Network, and UO faculty. The UO Center provides technical assistance to organizations throughout Oregon, with a focus on rural economic development. The UO EDAUC seeks to align local strategies to community needs, specifically with regards to building understanding of the benefits of sustainable practices and providing technical training to capitalize on economic opportunities related to those practices. The UO EDAUC is partially funded through a grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration. Additional EDA funding EDA was provided via the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

Indigenous Lands Acknowledgement

The University of Oregon is located on Kalapuya Ilihi, the traditional indigenous homeland of the Kalapuya people. Following treaties between 1851 and 1855, Kalapuya people were dispossessed of their indigenous homeland by the United States government and forcibly removed to the Coast Reservation in Western Oregon. Today, descendants are citizens of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde Community of Oregon and the Confederated Tribes of the Siletz Indians of Oregon, and continue to make important contributions in their communities, at UO, and across the land we now refer to as Oregon.

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Executive Summary

This report presents the results of an assessment into the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on six Oregon Economic Development Districts (EDDs). The assessment used The Ford Family Foundation’s “Listen to Learn” framework which involved conducted structured interviews with key stakeholders in the six participating economic development districts. The intent of the economic recovery needs assessment is to inform recovery planning and recovery efforts that EDDs, Resource Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE), and other economic development organizations (EDOs) will be engaging in over the coming months and years.

Introduction

The response to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated stay-at-home orders led to skyrocketing unemployment and other economic impacts. These impacts have been felt unequally across the economy with many sectors thriving during the pandemic and others—particularly leisure and hospitality—experience widespread job losses. What we did not anticipate in April 2020 was that the Federal Government would intervene and provide multiple rounds of economic support to mitigate the impact of lockdown policies. The pandemic underscored an array of key vulnerabilities within our economic system. With funds from the American Recovery Plan, EDDs and their government partners have a unique opportunity to innovate on recovery efforts with a focus on systemic issues.

To better understand the dynamics of COVID impacts on rural Oregon, six EDDs partnered with the Institute for Policy Research and Engagement (IPRE) and Resource Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE) AmeriCorps Program to engage a cohort of six RARE members in assessing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Economic data, regional trends and local narratives are interwoven to create this snapshot of rural Oregon.

“The pandemic shined a light on the fact that we are unprepared to deal with something like this.”

- MCEDD stakeholder

Key Findings

By compiling the findings from over 200 interviews conducted by RARE placements in participating EDDs, six themes emerged from the assessment:

1. Support for Individuals and Families
2. Built Environment and Land Use
3. Workforce Development
4. Small Business Support
5. Underserved Communities Support
6. Preparedness and Resilience

All these needs existed before the pandemic; the pandemic served to highlight issues within each area that taken together, have profound impacts on regional economies. The IPRE/RARE research team used themes as a lens to discover and organize the needs of rural Oregon. Using the framing of the key themes, five key needs emerged:

1. Expanding access to **health services** for rural residents
2. Ensuring attainable **housing** is available in every community
3. Closing the urban-rural **skills gap** to fill current vacancies and fuel future clusters
4. Investing in **physical assets** and **infrastructure** needed for a functioning **care economy**
5. Improving **access and delivery of government services** for rural businesses, nonprofits and the members of communities that are continually facing systemic discrimination

The assessment identified both barriers and opportunities to addressing the identified needs. Barriers tended towards “wicked problems” – problems that are difficult or impossible to solve because of incomplete, contradictory, and changing conditions. These problems are compounded when complicated systems and entire sectors of the economy (and society) interact and prevent progress on meeting identified needs. The research team identified many opportunities but focus on four opportunities for action. These opportunities can address multiple needs and barriers simultaneously. To address the barriers, districts and their partners must develop and take multi-objective actions – actions that solve multiple problems at once.

Key Themes Identified by the Needs Assessment



Opportunities for Action

Because of the nature of the issues identified in the needs assessment, we focus on opportunities for action. Taken as a whole, connecting the needs to the six themes spur action in the following four recommended areas:

I. Address Structural Inequity Through Economic Development Actions

EDDs have an opportunity to address the wealth and services gap for the working poor as well as Black, Indigenous and people of color [BIPOC] in rural communities through CEDS and implementing actions.

Action 0: Acknowledge the issues

Before beginning any other activities, the needs of the most vulnerable, as illuminated by this study, should be considered a top priority. As practitioners implement the recommendations of this report, and other frameworks provided by state-level partners, they must do so in conversation with the communities that are most vulnerable to economic disruptions. Specific issues include:

- Lack of timely translation services
- Public meeting accessibility
- Distrust of government, especially in undocumented communities
- Historic resource deprivation in BIPOC communities

Action 1: Establish a working committee

After acknowledging the issues, OEDD should create a committee tasked with establishing a work program that identifies realistic and measurable outcomes that further support DEI and JEDI initiatives. Ideally the committee will include both OEDD and outside representation. While we suggest that the committee develop its specific charge, we think it should focus on specific actions EDOs can engage in that will address structural economic inequities. This could begin with a review of how EDDs and other EDOs operation,

To create meaningful change in the lives of BIPOC and working poor rural residents, their current situation must be assessed. We anticipate that some of this work will be done as part of Business Oregon's Statewide COVID Economic Recovery Plan. That work can help inform the work of the committee.

Action 2: Use RARE placements to research local and regional needs of the BIPOC community and study best practices in economic development

RARE members provide the capacity, energy and lived experience to provide OEDD members with a cutting edge understanding of current best practices in community and economic development. As part of their yearly workplan, a RARE placement can build the relationships and codify the knowledge that OEDDs need to make progress on JEDI issues.

Action 3: Work with local elected officials and stakeholders to raise awareness of BIPOC issues

Oregon's economic development districts are "boundary spanners", their work cuts across many different organizations and topics, breaking down siloed governments in the process. This puts them in an excellent position to center conversations around JEDI/DEI issues, while their knowledge of regional actors provides an opportunity to find partners to take ownership over outcomes and activities.

Action 4: Implement the work plan

II. Incorporate Resilience into Everything

Findings from the needs assessment reinforce the role EDDs can play in increasing local, regional, and state-level resilience. Notably, other recent resilience assessment and planning efforts undertaken by EDDs in Oregon support these action opportunities. Because EDDs often work to coordinate diverse actors and interests, they are uniquely positioned to infuse resilience principles into everything they do.

Action 1: Expand OEDD's and OEDA's existing state-level efforts to support coordination of district-level resilience and recovery frameworks and objectives.

The work OEDD has completed on recovery planning is an excellent example of cross-organizational collaboration that can be expanded to address resilience and recovery from other disasters such as wildfires. OEDD should continue that work and invite new partners to the table. We recommend consideration of establishing a working group to keep the effort moving forward.

Action 2: Use findings from current disaster events (COVID, wildfires, winter storms, drought, etc.) to improve preparation for future emergency response and recovery efforts.

We've all learned a lot about responding to disasters over the past year. Organizations throughout the state will be preparing after action reports that evaluate response efforts. Beyond those formal evaluations, every economic development practitioner that was involved with COVID response and

recovery efforts will have learned something of value from the process. This action turns those lessons into a set of actions that will make response and recovery efforts more efficient and actions that will make businesses and communities more resilient.

Action 3: Utilize existing training tools to expand the number of businesses that have or incorporate disaster/continuity planning into their day-to-day operations.

Encouraging businesses to develop resilience or continuity of operations plans (COOPs) has been a challenge for everyone that has attempted to work in this area. It is not because of a lack of tools—plenty of tools exist. The key issue is how to raise awareness among businesses about how to make their business more resilient to shocks.

Action 4: Using the EDA/IEDC “restore your economy” model, establish local or regional business resilience and recovery structures organized by state recovery function.

EDDs and EDOs are uniquely positioned to strengthen capacity during crises. Pre-establishing roles and responsibilities that cover different economic recovery functions is imperative. Once established, named stakeholders can quickly open a one-stop business recovery center to connect individual businesses or business sectors with local, regional, state, federal, NGO, and philanthropic resources. Implementing this action will support other response and recovery activities.

Action 5: Directly engage businesses and populations that are most impacted by disasters in EDD resilience building efforts (e.g., vulnerable and underserved, historically marginalized, small business, etc.).

EDDs and EDOs engaged in considerable interactions with businesses throughout the pandemic. Consistent with Opportunity I, this action would engage businesses and under-represented populations in resilience building efforts.

III. Understand and Respond to Workforce Needs

Workforce emerged as a key issue during the pandemic. Whether it was issues around finding childcare or home schooling for working parents, or individuals laid off during the pandemic, workforce was a consistent theme in every district.

Action 0: Accept it is a problem

The rural workforce suffers from an interconnected knot of wicked problems – problems that cross districts, communities, and entire sectors of the economy. There are no easy solutions to the problems rural Oregon has been facing, especially legacy issues like workforce capacity. Workforce development hinges on addressing structural issues in the rural economy. The Barriers section outlines some of these concerns, including a lack of attainable housing, as well as the ongoing evolution in many rural communities from a predominantly resource-extractive economy to economies that blend extraction, entrepreneurship, innovation, agriculture, tourism, and manufacturing.

Some of the factors constraining workforce development that this study revealed include:

- Housing
- Access to childcare
- Lack of interest in current programs and pipelines
- Brain drain
- Structural changes in rural economies

Action 1: Establish regional working groups

Continue to build on momentum began by regional responses to the pandemic. Mitigating economic harms caused by COVID-19 required stakeholders from every sector to communicate more. OEDDs should work with workforce investment boards [WIBs], business resource centers (SBDCs), local governments, policymakers, educators, and community champions to create regional working groups.

Action 2: Partner with local WIBs to engage RARE placements on understanding needs and issues businesses face around workforce

Like the actions related to strengthening connections with rural BIPOC Oregonians, RARE placements provide capacity and access to the latest best practices in community and economic developments. Placements can act as bridges that identify opportunities for action, and coordinate a regional, multilateral response. By strengthening these relationships, regions can be better prepared for future problems by knowing the assets and actors they have available to them.

Action 3: Develop and implement actions

IV. Expand Cross-District Collaboration

Collaboration among EDOs increased dramatically during the pandemic. An opportunity exists to build on this collaboration in ways that increase the relevance of EDDs in Oregon and leverage scant resources.

Action 0: Expand engagement in monthly OEDD meetings

OEDD's monthly meetings offer an opportunity to link the actions individual districts are taking to those of other EDOs and state agencies. Linking actions and leveraging combined resources produces outcomes where all parties are in alignment, working together toward shared goals. Framing monthly meetings as an opportunity for this kind of engagement elevates the issues member districts are facing and connects them with potential partners.

Action 1: Establish “communities of practice” around pressing issues such as structural inequity, resilience, and workforce

Oregon's Economic Development Districts have the opportunity to share resources, programming and best practices among their membership. By reaching agreement on common goals and establishing shared indicators or metrics, OEDD members can compare their progress toward solving these wicked problems and collaborate on implementing solutions.

Action 2: Identify projects or specific actions using the Strategic Doing framework

To build stronger relationships and to better take advantage of existing assets within their regions, OEDD members should stay vigilant for opportunities to include each other and their partners in economic development programming. Combining the needs assessments (including this report) with regional asset mapping exercises, provides fertile ground for new projects to take root.

To do so effectively requires that all parties be clear on their shared goals, objectives, and terms. That is, having a shared understanding of what it is they are all working toward, and what they individual can contribute. Issues (or barriers) that span districts, like workforce, housing and infrastructure are opportunities for collaboration.

Connecting assets on hand with shared objectives to create quick wins is the essence of the Strategic Doing framework.

Conclusion

Oregon has always been a low resource state; we have no reason to expect that to change substantially in the future. EDDs and EDOs have learned to cope with limited resources while serving enormous regions. OEDD and EDOs have an opportunity to leverage their activities for the benefit of all Oregonians. Collaboration is a vital element of success. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that EDOs have the capacity to collaborate in meaningful and effective ways. The actions outlined in this report, while modest, are intended to build on that success.

I. Introduction

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Background

The response to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated stay-at-home orders led to skyrocketing unemployment and other economic impacts. These impacts have been felt unequally across the economy with many sectors thriving during the pandemic and others—particularly leisure and hospitality—experience widespread job losses. What we did not anticipate in April 2020 was that the Federal Government would intervene and provide multiple rounds of economic support to mitigate the impact of lockdown policies. The pandemic underscored an array of key vulnerabilities within our economic system. With funds from the American Recovery Plan, EDDs and their government partners have a unique opportunity to innovate on recovery efforts with a focus on systemic issues.

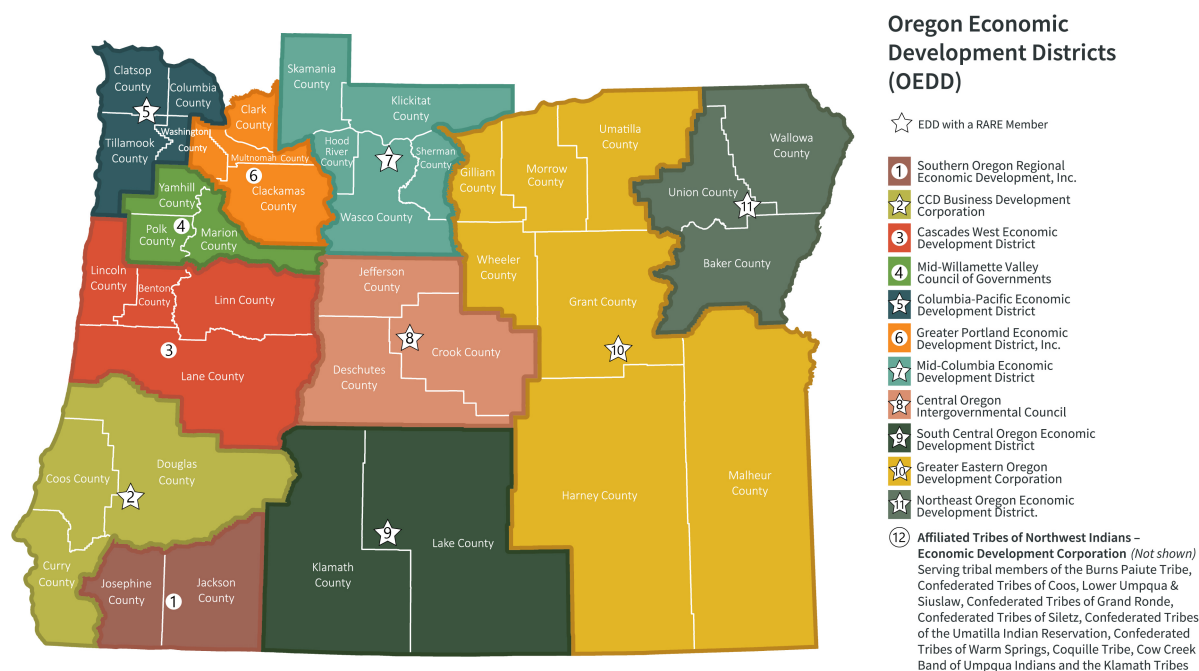
Oregon’s economic development ecosystem will be responsible for designing and implementing recovery efforts. As EDDs and partner economic development organizations (EDOs) are aware, the ecosystem consists of many players that operate in loosely connected networks with limited central coordination, including federal and state agencies, local governments, private sector, education, and nonprofits. Engaging, coordinating, and leveraging these players is critical to a successful recovery.

In developing recovery strategies from the pandemic, economic development agencies must respond to the economic impacts of the pandemic with effective coordination, centralized leadership, and efficient decision-making. They must forge new partnerships to undertake the necessary planning to organize continuity and recovery efforts. Without this effort at the outset, our communities will struggle to recover, and many may not be able to return to pre-COVID levels of economic activity.

Purpose and Methods

The purpose of this study was to understand the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on key sectors within rural Oregon from the viewpoint of people with direct experience from the pandemic. The study is a qualitative assessment that builds from more than 200 interviews with stakeholders in six regions that focused on identifying issues, barriers and opportunities as heard from local voices in the region. Six EDDs partnered with Institute for Policy Research and Engagement [IPRE] and Resource Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE) AmeriCorps Program to engage a cohort of six RARE members in assessing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Each of the participating districts is shown on the map in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Geography of Participating Economic Development Districts



This report is a compilation of the needs assessments conducted by RARE members in the six participating EDDs. The assessments represent perceptions of the pandemic from a point in time – interviews were between December 2020 and April 2021. At that time, nine months into the pandemic, the impacts were clearly felt as were the policy responses intended to control the public health crisis created by COVID-19.

In September 2020, IPRE and RARE implemented a novel cohort-based approach to address COVID impacts in rural Oregon using RARE members embedded in the districts supported by IPRE research faculty. This cohort approach provided a unique opportunity to implement parallel assessments in regions and to understand how impacts were felt in different regions of the state. Each member researched their region’s impacts and recovery needs. RARE members worked with local leaders and economic development professionals to identify keypersons for interviews and collect relevant economic data. Table 1 lists the participating districts and the number of persons interviewed in each district.

Table 1. Participating Economic Development Districts and Persons Interviewed

District Name	Number of Persons Interviewed
Mid-Columbia Economic Development District [MCEDD]	25
South Central Oregon Economic Development District [SCOEDD]	20
CCD Business Development Corporation [CCD]	40
Greater East Oregon Economic Development Corporation [GEOEDD]	16
Northeast Oregon Economic Development District [NEOEDD]	70
Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council [COIC]	27
Total	198

Source: IPRE Oregon Rural Needs Assessment

The Listen to Learn Framework

The needs assessment used The Ford Family Foundation’s “Listen to Learn” framework¹, as part of their principles and practices for community building. RARE members conversed with community members to identify (learn) of their needs and where opportunities exist. The framework is intended to probe the breadth and depth of a community’s knowledge. The framework uses a four-step process:

1. **Identify:** Know and honor the history and context of the community. Read about the history. Read about current events; local newspapers are a good place to start. Understand critical data.
2. **Assess:** Be clear about why you are listening. Are you inspired? Hurt? Angry? Curious?
3. **Connect:** Listen actively and openly to individuals and small groups close to you. Go to existing spaces. Create new listening spaces if needed. Listen for themes, trends, and perspectives. Discover other people or groups you should be listening to.
4. **Learn:** Widen your listening to include the hard to reach, resisting forces, and a diversity of perspectives and sectors. Keep an eye out for energizers and mobilizers. Document what you hear and pull-out findings. Share back what you are hearing; for accuracy and to confirm your findings. Determine what you have learned and what to do with the learnings.

-Ford Family Foundation Community Building Action Center

The Listen to Learn framework leads to grassroots change by illuminating the full lived experience of the target community and showcasing what projects they think would bring positive change.

Other Efforts to Support Economic Recovery from the Impact of COVID-19’s

Other organizations are actively working on COVID recovery efforts. This study recognizes the important contributions of communities, policy makers and political leaders toward addressing the economic fallout of the pandemic.

- Oregon Equity Framework¹
- Oregon Governor’s 10-point Action Plan for Recovery²
- Community ROCKit COVID-19 Resiliency Framework³
- OEDD Statewide Economic Recovery Plan
- EDA Investment Priorities (2021)⁴

The rural Oregon needs assessment intends to support these efforts by broadening the base of information available to inform recovery efforts. Considerable attention has been paid to the economic data—the Oregon Office of Economic Analysis created a COVID-19 Tracking page (<https://oregoneconomicanalysis.com/covidtracking/>) in early 2020 and has been providing additional analysis through their blog (<https://oregoneconomicanalysis.com/>).

This report provides a qualitative assessment of the impacts by bringing regional voices to light and sharing those experiences.

¹ “State of Oregon Equity Framework in COVID-19 Response and Recovery, 2020.” Available at https://www.oregon.gov/gov/policy/Documents/EquityFrameworkCovid19_2020.pdf

² “Governor Kate Brown Announces 10-Point Economic Recovery Plan to Help Oregon Families and Businesses,” March 23, 2020. <https://www.oregon.gov/newsroom/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?newsid=54384>.

³ Community ROCKit. “ROCKit | A Blueprint for Community Recovery in the Time of COVID.” Accessed April 23, 2021. <https://www.communityrockit.org>.

⁴ “Investment Priorities | U.S. Economic Development Administration.” Accessed April 23, 2021. <https://www.eda.gov/about/investment-priorities/>.

II. Findings

The findings in this report reveal that rural regional and community response to and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic revolve around a similar set of themes, needs and opportunities. Conversing with stakeholders, we learned that rural communities have similar concerns. Some of those concerns are unique to rural areas and are different than those of their urban counterparts. Rural communities are more sensitive to changes in visitor volume, have been less successful in pivoting to remote work, have struggled more with childcare and home schooling, and find labor force issues more challenging. The difficulties rural Oregonians have had accessing services, building community disaster response capacity, healthcare and information technology are shown in stark contrast as the world moved to remote work, virtual classrooms, and telemedicine.

Themes, Opportunities, Needs and Barriers in Rural Oregon

A theme for the purposes of this report are the ideas and topics that rural communities have been responding to, or offering up, in our conversations with stakeholders. The themes acknowledge the existing difficulties facing rural economies, while pointing toward possible solutions (or opportunities).

Theme I: Supporting Individuals, Families and Communities

Every household and community in Oregon has been impacted by the pandemic. However, this assessment finds those impacts are not shared equally across the socio-economic spectrum nor across regions of the state. Where many households, businesses, industry sectors, and entire communities have been negatively impacted by the pandemic, others have thrived. Most notably, the virus and the public health response to it has dramatically changed prosperity and daily routines for workers across sectors. These disruptions have sparked secondary crises in health and economic opportunity for many rural residents.

According to data from The Ford Family Foundation's 2020 Oregon by the Numbers Report,⁵ 48% of rural households are experiencing some financial difficulties, compared to 43% of urban residents.

Opportunity:

Economic development districts and their partners can foster equitable economies that meet the holistic needs of their residents by advocating for targeted investments to enhance their constituents' quality of life.

Key Needs

Affordable and Attainable Housing

Rural workers need access to housing that allows them grow and adapt their living arrangements as the economy reopens. A 2020 report by ECONorthwest conducted as part of HB 2003 concluded state has a

⁵ https://www.tfff.org/sites/default/files/OregonByTheNumbers2019_12Aug.pdf

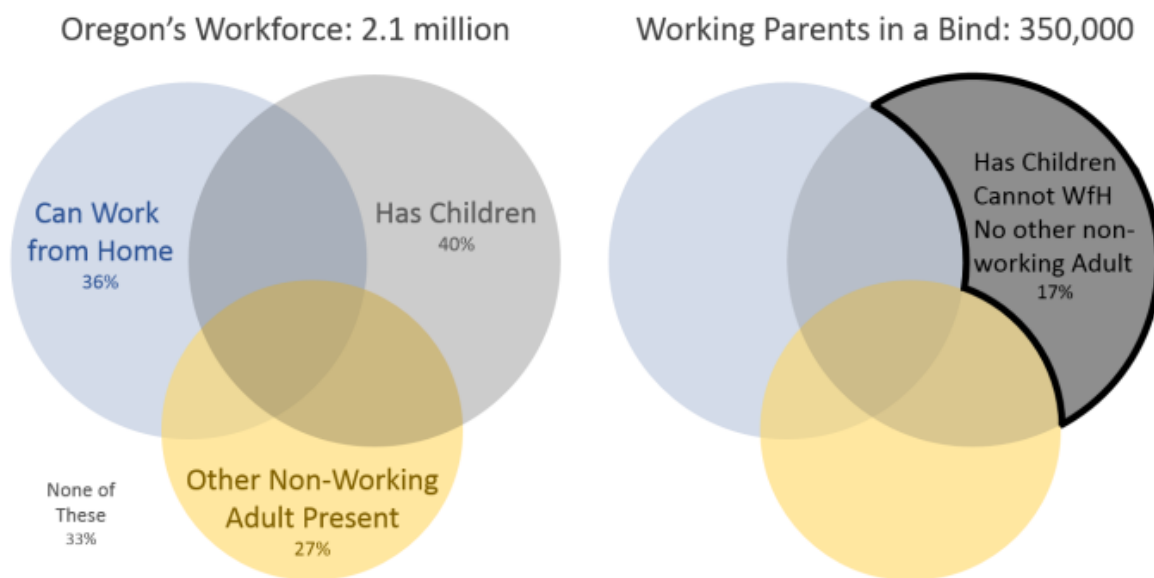
structural deficit of 155,000 housing units.⁶ The 2020 wildfires destroyed more than 4,000 homes.⁷ Currently, there is a lack of affordable units if there are any housing available at all. This particularly impacts the free movement of labor, making it difficult for rural communities to build and maintain a productive workforce. Some regions are experiencing increases in homelessness or families having to double up to remain housed. Some stakeholders suggested that COVID exacerbated these issues.

Childcare and primary education

The COVID-19 pandemic put incredible strain on the state’s childcare delivery and education sectors. The broader workforce was challenged to provide childcare in the wake of closures. The challenges related to childcare labor participation suggest a need for public-private partnerships to recognize and meet childcare as a workforce need.

Between public education shifting to an online or hybrid model that sees students at home at least part of the workweek, and childcare facility capacity constraints due to public health precautions, the need for affordable childcare is high in rural Oregon. Many interviewees commented on how crippling the lack of childcare has been to their economy as they have been adapting to the pandemic. As in many communities, many parents are having to choose between earning a wage and staying home to take care of their children.

COVID Challenges Working Oregon Parents



Data: 2018 ACS | Source: IPUMS-USA, Univ of Chicago, Oregon Office of Economic Analysis

Many rural school districts faced budget constraints prior to the pandemic. Students and teachers have been asked to adapt on-the-fly to hybrid and remote instruction. Interviewees report that educators are lacking sufficient supplies and expertise to fully replicate the school experience. Furthermore, the hybrid

⁶ <https://www.oregon.gov/ohcs/about-us/Documents/RHNA/2020-RHNA-Technical-Report-Final.pdf>

⁷ <https://wildfire.oregon.gov/>

school models have put increasing pressure on working parents to supplement and support their children's education while trying to maintain employment. This is often compounded for rural communities by longer travel distances and commute times.

Access to healthcare and mental services

Rural America had been facing declining access to healthcare access prior to COVID. Rural communities make up a fifth of the nation's population but are only home to 10% of America's physicians.⁸ Taken together, rural communities are losing at least 10 hospitals every year.⁹ In 2019 that number was 18, in 2020, 20 hospitals closed¹⁰. Research commissioned by the American Hospital Association states that across the nation? hospitals are set to lose between \$53 and \$122 billion dollars in 2021¹¹. This is largely driven by moratoriums on elective surgery due to COVID-19.

"Telehealth makes it more convenient for people to get healthcare, but broadband is still a huge barrier for our rural communities."

-MCEDD stakeholder

In rural Oregon, 11 hospitals are in some danger of closing doors, according to research by The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Hospitals have responded by offering more services online. However, access to technology, broadband and digital literacy issues have made the switch to telemedicine difficult for rural communities. Compounding this is a dire need for mental health services due to reported feelings of stress, despair, and burnout among rural residents, as reported by interviewees.

Theme II: Infrastructure Resiliency and Connectivity for Growth

Interviewees called for renewed investment in rural communities. The infrastructure needed must support both current and future needs. The pandemic has accelerated economic shifts toward advanced manufacturing, green energy, and knowledge economy jobs. At the same time, climate change and growth pressures in some historically rural, resource-based Oregon communities has driven new conversation about balancing natural resource extraction, the built environment needs of communities and sustainability goals for future generations. The pandemic helped to crystalize attention around resiliency and natural hazards (including pandemic) mitigation and is an opportunity to develop the kinds of plans, actions and relationships needed to respond to coming disasters – the Cascadian Subduction Event (also known as the Big One, an expected 9.0+ earthquake that will shake the Pacific Northwest), the next pandemic, severe droughts, or other hazards. Wisely planned infrastructure today can create a more resilient region tomorrow, while providing ongoing economic benefits as communities grow.

Opportunity: By making and advocating for targeted investments in communications, transportation, and utility infrastructure, rural communities can foster home-grown innovation economies that support growth in key sectors.

⁸ "Closing the Gaps in the Rural Primary Care Workforce." Accessed April 28, 2021.
<https://www.ncsl.org/research/health/closing-the-gaps-in-the-rural-primary-care-workfor.aspx>.

⁹ Sheps Center. "180 Rural Hospital Closures: January 2005 – Present (136 since 2010)." Accessed April 11, 2021.
<https://www.shepscenter.unc.edu/programs-projects/rural-health/rural-hospital-closures/>.

¹⁰ "Why Rural Hospital Closures Hit a Record High in 2020." Accessed April 11, 2021.
<https://www.beckershospitalreview.com/finance/why-rural-hospital-closures-hit-a-record-high-in-2020.html>.

¹¹ Ibid.

Key Needs

Equitable access to broadband

It is documented that Federal Communication Commission [FCC] data overrepresents internet access within urban communities, especially those with large census tracts.¹² Even by that measure, rural Oregon, especially frontier towns, are less likely to have broadband access than urban communities¹³. Without broadband speeds of at least 25 mbps download and 3 mbps upload, it is difficult to participate in the modern economy. This is especially true as dependence on video streaming, teleconferencing, telemedicine, and one-click on-line business markets increase across economic sectors: All require high-speed and high-capacity on-line network connections.

Redundant and resilient transportation networks

Federal and state disinvestment in highways and declining revenues from natural resource extraction (including federal timber payments) has led to systematic decline in the quality and connectivity of rural transportation networks. A recent report puts the cost of address deferred maintenance on infrastructure in the U.S. at more than \$1 trillion.¹⁴ With growing demand due to increased commuter traffic, and growing populations in desirable rural communities, transportation network issues are becoming more pressing. In the case of a catastrophic earthquake, including the 9.0+ magnitude seismic event known as the Cascadian Subduction Event or simply, “the Big One”, the demand placed on rural infrastructure will increase as refugees flee urban centers for unaffected rural areas. Outside of emergency situations, aging infrastructure has made rural Oregon more vulnerable to supply chain interruptions.

[Our recovery strategy is to] invest in infrastructure and not people: Spend on roads, sewer and water to businesses, [also] green field development, parks [and] trails.

GEODC - Government administrator

Theme III: Building the Workforce of Tomorrow

Many stakeholders connected to the economic development districts in this report recognize the need to retool their workforce. Advances in manufacturing, resource extraction and agriculture require that workers learn new skills to stay competitive. At the same time, many districts reported sizable numbers of job openings. Communities are reconsidering what kind of economy they want to support, given that traditional skills in manufacturing, agriculture and resource extraction are no longer in demand.

Opportunity: OEDDs can engage in a rapid upskilling of the rural workforce by connecting students and job seekers with a variety of career paths and training opportunities with partners in higher education, workforce development and private businesses

Key Needs

Mitigating brain-drain

Interviewees reported their concern with the professional development opportunities that are currently available to rural students. The net migration rate in rural Oregon is 20-points lower than that of urban

¹² BroadbandNow. “FCC Underestimates Americans Unserved by Broadband Internet by 50% | BroadbandNow.Com.” Accessed May 18, 2021. <https://broadbandnow.com/research/fcc-underestimates-unserved-by-50-percent>.

¹³ Oregon By the Numbers 2020

¹⁴ <https://www.volckeralliance.org/sites/default/files/attachments/Americas%20Trillion-Dollar%20Repair%20Bill%20-%20Capital%20Budgeting%20and%20the%20Disclosure%20of%20State%20Infrastructure%20Needs.pdf>

communities,¹⁵ with frontier counties being particularly vulnerable to declines. Interviewees noted that high school graduates are increasingly likely to seek out urban careers rather than join the rural workforce

Stronger partnerships between industry, higher-ed, and workforce organizations

Interviewees expressed concerns that workforce development is occurring in silos. Many indicated that the programming that is being offered is duplicative of others' or is simply disconnected from the current and future needs of employers. The lack of formal internship, mentorship, and apprenticeship programs further exacerbates this issue. As a result, many young people simply don't see a future for themselves in rural Oregon.

Offering multiple, diverse career pathways

With traditional career paths, such the straight-out-of-school job-for-life, being made unavailable in today's economy, participants observed that rural students need to be shown different career roadmaps. Opportunities surrounding entrepreneurial development, career technical education [CTE], enlisting mentors, engaging higher education institutions with local public schools and apprenticeship programs were explored during the interview process.

Theme IV: Supporting Small Businesses and Entrepreneurs

In the words of the Oregon Office of Economic Analysis:¹⁶

"The pandemic has impacted all aspects of the economy to varying degrees. Small business in particular appear the most vulnerable as they generally lack sizable reserves, access to capital markets like large businesses, and at times even traditional banking relationships.

Unfortunately, we know not all small businesses have or will survive the cycle. The question is just how much damage is done and what does it mean for the overall outlook? Estimates here vary. Some seemingly credible third-party data sources that track firms using a particular software or the like, indicate that an apocalyptic 30% of businesses in Oregon have closed. Those same sources indicate an unfathomable 50% of leisure and hospitality firms have closed ... Thankfully no hard data source shows the total number of businesses in Oregon is plunging, after accounting for closures and start-ups."

Interventions, particularly the Paycheck Protection Program [PPP] have saved rural Oregon from permanent economic devastation. According to the Oregon Office of Economic Analysis, the total number of businesses operating in the state has remained remarkably stable throughout the pandemic thanks to cash infusions like the PPP. It is unclear if the remaining small businesses will survive an unexpected spike in pandemic infection rates or if relief funding dries up, especially those in leisure and hospitality. Until normal visitation levels are restored, rural communities must deal with concentrated job losses in leisure and hospitality, particularly Hood River and Deschutes counties, as well as communities on the coast.¹⁷ The passage of the American Rescue Plan in March 2021, provides additional needed relief to rural governments and businesses.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Oregon Office of Economic Analysis. "So Far Fewer Business Closures than Expected," March 2, 2021. <https://oregoneconomicanalysis.com/2021/03/02/so-far-fewer-business-closures-than-expected/>.

¹⁷ "Disparate Impact: Oregon COVID-19 Recession Job Losses and Recovery by County - Article Display Content - QualityInfo." Accessed April 28, 2021. <https://www.qualityinfo.org/-/disparate-impact-oregon-covid-19-recession-job-losses-and-recovery-by-county>.

Opportunity: Oregon’s economic development districts can convene businesses, entrepreneurs and community organizations, and rural governments to provide programming that fosters a flourishing economy.

Key Needs

Business recovery support programs with fewer barriers to entry

Many interviewees, including service providers and businesses, brought up how difficult it was to navigate the processes put in place to access funding. Digital divide and access issues aside, the recovery programming that is being offered is difficult for rural entities to take advantage of. Rural businesses and nonprofits, according to interviewees, are lacking the basic capacity to compete for funding, as they have been forced to adapt to the pandemic while trying to continue operations. These organizations also tend to lack the relationships with funders, the writing skills and the financial literacy required to file a competitive application.

“Often times, the people who need the most help are harder to reach. We need to start training people where to look in times of emergency.”

– MCEDD stakeholder

Stakeholders across regions noted how useful it would be to have a grants writer or administrator embedded in communities to help them connect applicants to funding. To fill the gaps, that person would need to make others aware of funding opportunities, be able to review grant applications from the community, and be able to apply for funding themselves on behalf of the communities within their region.

Theme V: Supporting Underserved Communities

The labor segments with the highest layoffs are women, BIPOC, and low-income workers primarily from the service and hospitality industries. Differences in culture and systematic discrimination has kept Black, indigenous and people of color [BIPOC] from receiving critical services, even before the pandemic. Rural communities, specifically the AAPI, indigenous and Latinx communities, have had difficulties receiving their share of pandemic relief services, both public health and economic interventions, due to community perceptions and systemic barriers.

Opportunity: Oregon’s economic development districts can serve as conveners and by listening to the needs of all their residents, rural communities can provide a greater quality of life for all and foster a more prosperous economy.

Key Needs

Targeted services

Timely translations and targeted support that meets communities where they are at. As new programs are being offered, interviewees connected to nonnative English-speaking communities noticed that information was not being translated or adapted to their needs. Additionally, respondents reported that information was not being dispersed properly (contacting community leaders, or posting in frequented areas like churches, ethnic specific markets, etc.).

For a State emphasizing so much on JEDI, inclusivity and equity, we missed the mark. Our [Latinx] community missed out on a very short window of time to apply for funding.’

– SCOEDD Interviewee

Financial assistance

Women and minorities are disproportionately represented in “essential” jobs.¹⁸ Many have had difficulties accessing services, due to systemic barriers and a lack of trust in government, fears about government discovering the undocumented members of the community, and in a general lacking of relationships with the financial sector – the economically disadvantaged are less likely to be “banked”

and thus, have relationships they can draw on with the financial institutions that have been in charge of distributing much of the pandemic relief programming.¹⁹ As such, these communities have been “bootstrapping”, relying on informal networks to raise money for necessities and emergencies, while individuals and businesses are having to rely on credit and other high-interest loans.

"We are coming out of a recession, and we have to remember that we are building for the next one. For the future, we need to focus on the things that prevent the economic volatility."

– COIC Interviewee

Theme VI: Preparing for Disaster and Natural Hazards Resilient Economy

Resiliency is the capacity of a community to recover to, and eventually exceed, its productivity before and after a disaster. More resilient communities recover from disasters more quickly and can use the disaster to focus energy and attention toward creating a new and better way of life.

Ongoing conversations, as well as the relationships being built around them, have shown the need for greater resiliency planning and more thoughtful implementation. Many of the communities in this study lacked some combination of the capacity and interest in planning for potential crises. Specifically, capacity for recovery and resilience planning were cited as key needs. The far-reaching impacts of the pandemic has shown that it is important to have relationships and plans in place to muster an effective response to a sudden change in economic conditions.

Opportunity: OEDDs can use their position to take a longer view of time and motivate rural communities to capture the energy of this moment, creating durable change in the way they understand and respond to natural hazards, disasters, and other threats. Doing so can radically improve how well regions recover from the coming economic shocks.

Key Needs

Ongoing preparedness planning for economic disruptions

The pandemic has shown the weaknesses in the relationships between community organizations, governments, and the private sector. Without these networks in place, the response to the pandemic has been fragmented and sluggish, according to interviewees. The pandemic has catalyzed the creation, and shown the value of, regional response collaboratives. These groups can be activated in response to coming economic shocks and are a natural place to continue resiliency planning.

Improved communication networks

¹⁸ Boesch, Diana, and Shilpa Phadke. “When Women Lose All the Jobs: Essential Actions for a Gender-Equitable Recovery.” Center for American Progress. Accessed May 3, 2021. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2021/02/01/495209/women-lose-jobs-essential-actions-gender-equitable-recovery/>.

¹⁹ Hispanic Research Center. “The Majority of Low-Income Hispanic and Black Households Have Little-to-No Bank Access, Complicating Access to COVID Relief Funds.” Accessed May 3, 2021. <https://www.hispanicresearchcenter.org/research-resources/the-majority-of-low-income-hispanic-and-black-households-have-little-to-no-bank-access-complicating-access-to-covid-relief-funds/>.

The scramble to share accurate and actionable information, interviewees observed, has overwhelmed service providers. Interviewees noted being overwhelmed with communications from government partners, consisting of public health updates and changes to regulations as the pandemic unfolds. Interviewees reported success in using social media to share news about the pandemic and support programming

Trainings that are culturally relevant; resources offered in multiple languages and inclusive meetings.

Rural Oregon's most vulnerable communities, including Latinx and other non-English speakers, are not meaningfully included in the resiliency planning and disaster response process because of structural, cultural and language barriers. It is difficult for these communities to attend meetings during business hours, and without translation services available, challenging for them to meaningfully participate.

Develop a local fund to support risk reduction/resilience efforts

Organizational representatives of service providers and business associations are hurting. Interviewees recognize that for the next disaster or economic shock, they will need liquidity to be able to respond quickly. As federal funding is not forthcoming, due to capacity challenges in rural governments' ability to seek support, some communities are opting to self-insure.

Food access/security/storage

The Greater East Oregon Economic Development District found that communities connected to Bend, OR only have three days' food if the region was cut off from outside markets. Similarly, Interviewees and research by the Oregon Food Bank find that the residents of many rural counties are facing food insecurity—including ethnic minority communities who had issues accessing healthy foods during the pandemic:²⁰

[Nearly] 13% of Oregonians still worry about how to feed themselves and their families. And some communities – particularly communities of color and rural communities – are impacted even more deeply by hunger. If hunger was a disease, we could call this an epidemic. – OFB 2019 Snapshot

"I hope that we can be working on having a more resilient food system...when we have big landslides or other natural events that we might be able to provide for ourselves. When I first moved here four years ago, we had that crazy snowstorm and we didn't have produce for over a month in our grocery stores. Sometimes it takes living through something to realize that this is actually a problem."

- MCEDD stakeholder

Interruptions to the food supply due to the pandemic have demonstrated how fragile the food system is. The Oregon Food Bank, working with AmeriCorps RARE and the Meyer Memorial Trust, found that rural residents had to travel much farther for fresh food, and were less likely to be able to store it, compared to urban residents.²¹ Interviewees, especially in remote areas, are aware that they will be on their own for weeks or months following a disruption and are asking for policy makers to consider stockpiling food and supplies.

Recovery dashboard

Study participants commented on the need for a "recovery dashboard", or a one-stop shop for organizations and members of the community to monitor the pandemic and coming disasters. Indicators

²⁰ oregonfoodbank. "Snapshot of Hunger." Oregon Food Bank (blog). Accessed May 23, 2021. <https://www.oregonfoodbank.org/about-us/financials-and-reports/snapshot-of-hunger/>.

²¹ "The State of Our Community Food System." Meyer Memorial Trust, 2015. https://www.oregonfoodbank.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/The-State-of-Our-Community-Food-System_web.pdf.

could include economic data, visitor travel information, current pandemic advisory notices, available relief services and the level of relief program uptake by beneficiaries.

III. Barriers

While the focus of this assessment was on identifying opportunities for action, interviewees identified several barriers.

An Aging Workforce

Older adults make up a significant share of the rural population and have a complicated relationship with their local economy. According to 2016 American Community Survey data²², rural Oregon contains less than 20% of the state's population but more than 25% of Oregon's 65-and-older population.

Rural economies will need to be responsive to the business and career decisions their older residents. They are an important economic driver – the Boomer generation owns 41% of all small businesses, according to research Guidant Financial.²³ Pandemic-era research by the Kauffman Foundation finds that more than 25% of new entrepreneurs are between the ages of 55-64 (up from ~15% in the 1990s).²⁴

Beyond self-employment, many still work and contribute to the local tax base. Higher concentrations of older adults create greater demand for some services, like healthcare and assisted living facilities, while reducing demand for services that primarily target adults in their prime earning years, such as K12 education and childcare.

Population trends indicate that the rural population is likely to get older thus reducing the pool of traditional working-age residents further. Rural economic developers will need to monitor trends these to fully take advantage of the entirety of their workforce.

The digital divide

Interviewees observed that many members of their community have been slow to make the pivot toward remote work, teleservices, online schooling, and e-commerce. Access to broadband has been an ongoing issue for rural Oregonians prior to the pandemic. Lack of access has inhibited economic development for the region- affecting countless aspects of everyday life such as paying bills online, communication, business marketing and education. According to recent affordability data, Oregon lags many other states, with only 24.5% of its residents having access to a low-priced (\$60/month or under) internet plan.²⁵ . The pandemic has accelerated trends toward the digital economy and is expected to continue.

²² Bureau, US Census. "Older Population in Rural America." The United States Census Bureau. Accessed April 18, 2021. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2019/10/older-population-in-rural-america.html>.

²³ Guidant Financial. "2021 Small Business Trends & Statistics." Accessed April 28, 2021. <https://www.guidantfinancial.com/small-business-trends/>.

²⁴ "Entrepreneurs of a Certain Age, in This Uncertain Time." Accessed April 28, 2021. <https://www.kauffman.org/currents/entrepreneurs-of-a-certain-age-uncertain-time/>.

²⁵ BroadbandNow. "Best and Worst States for Internet Coverage, Prices and Speeds, 2020 | BroadbandNow.Com." Accessed May 2, 2021. <https://broadbandnow.com/research/best-states-with-internet-coverage-and-speed>.

Supply-side housing constraints and increased demand for "Zoomtowns"

Land-use regulations limiting the supply of housing and increased pressure from urban employment centers are squeezing the number of available housing units in the state. Multiple interviewees noted that rural Oregon was not even being considered by the business community due to the lack of workforce housing.

According to the latest *Oregon By The Numbers* report, Hood River, Deschutes, Josephine, and Wasco counties join the Portland, Corvallis and Eugene metros in the upper third of costliest rents, while frontier counties are the most affordable (in terms of fair market rent indicators).²⁶ Regardless of costs, interviewees across the participant districts commented on how difficult it was to find housing.

Housing strategies are intrinsically linked to workforce health.

– COIC Interviewee

Exacerbating this is a surge in demand from remote workers and new residents who are seeking out rural communities for their bucolic amenities – creating a boom in “Zoomtowns” as more and more (comparatively) wealthy professionals move into communities from higher-income areas, gradually pricing out residents and businesses alike. This is evident in the Deschutes County housing market, where prices are up 12% compared to pre-pandemic levels due to housing pressure from new arrivals to the Bend metro.²⁷

Broadband under-deployment

Undergirding the lack of internet access in rural Oregon are the difficulties of any private market internet service provider [ISP] to achieve sufficient scale to justify their investment in a market. The long distances and low population density of rural Oregon, especially frontier counties, makes it unlikely that the private market will be able to provide timely and affordable internet access.

Until recently, with the introduction of new legislation by the Biden Administration, the federal agencies have not directed adequate funds to rural communities to rebuild roads, water or develop broadband infrastructure. Difficulties in measuring broadband market penetration have only compounded this issue.

Desire for remote work

Rural communities are navigating the competing interests incoming remote workers, current residents, and the interests of rural youths. Interviewees observed that rural residents were less enthusiastic about adapting to remote work than their urban counterparts due to the digital divide and cultural norms around in-person dealings. Remote workers, however, are excited about rural Oregon, leading to the “Zoomtown” boom in communities that have both broadband and outdoor amenities. Recognizing this, some interviewees indicated that youths would be more interested in staying in rural Oregon if they had more remote working opportunities. Accessing services for businesses and marginalized groups in rural and frontier communities, interviewees found, are not accessible to working people and non-English speakers.

²⁶ Oregon by the Numbers, 2020.

²⁷ KTVZ. “Zoom City: Bend’s Median Home Price Hits \$529K amid Hot C.O. Real Estate Market,” August 11, 2020. <https://ktvz.com/news/bend/2020/08/10/zoom-city-bends-average-home-price-hits-529k-amid-hot-c-o-real-estate-market/>.

Services and programming only offered during business hours is out of reach for caregivers and essential workers. Materials, communications, and practitioners that are only able to communicate in English present a barrier to the Latinx community, who must wait for the information to be translated, wasting precious time. This continues a historic trend of government service providers not investing in relationship building with these communities, contributing to a “trust gap” observable to interviewees.

Distance, technology access, broadband, language barriers and information challenges were cited as barriers that are preventing frontier communities from receiving their share of pandemic support programming by those interviewed. Specifically, lack of shared resources to provide capacity and support at a regional scale.

Capacity challenges compounded by pandemic strains

Interviewees across the spectrum reported that their organizations are feeling strained by the pandemic, now in its second year. As individuals are forced to adapt every aspect of their life, notably how (even if) they work and how to provide for their children or the elderly in their lives, they must also consider how to restructure their places of business to meet shifting public health goals and changing regulations. This has made it difficult to muster the time and money (capacity) to seek out programming.

Information and communication challenges

In discussions with interviewees two information problems have arisen:

- 1) Within governments and service providers, there **is too much information** coming in to be processed by a limited staff and an organization that is already at capacity
- 2) For the public, fractured media ecosystems, a lack of trust in government and misinformation has creating a situation **where too little information** is making it to the community

Organizations have been solving this need by focusing their resources on getting information to key partners, such as community service providers and chambers of commerce. Those intermediaries are most likely to be trusted and have connections to the people who are most likely to take advantage of programming, or who are vulnerable to changes in regulation.

Lack of familiarity or technical skills to attain relief

Small businesses must overcome two difficult obstacles to receive relief. The first is a gap in grant (or loan) reporting requirements and what is necessary for their internal business planning, according to interviewees. They may not have the technical or financial skills to produce and package the information banks (or other service providers require).

Those seeking relief must also have the time and bureaucratic savvy to navigate changing requirements if they are made aware of these opportunities at all due to information challenges.

Accessing both technology and broadband

As in previous cases, the limited access to broadband internet and the slower adoption of ever-improving technology has made it difficult for rural businesses to keep up with their urban counterparts, even

The pandemic also highlighted accessibility issues for the Latinx community. Public services that are open from 9am-5pm don't fit the time schedules for workers in manufacturing and agriculture, creating barriers to access assistance, especially healthcare. Another barrier is language- information is not readily available in Spanish. Lastly, there is a lot of mistrust of the government amongst the Latinx community; making free services underutilized by this community.

– Findings from GEODC

before the pandemic. As much government business occurs online, most notable as videoconferencing has replaced in-person meetings, rural businesses are at a severe disadvantage accessing services.

Barriers to resiliency planning and rapid recovery

The rural organizations that the interviewees work with and represent report that they are lacking the capacity, time, and resources to devote to advancing natural hazards mitigation, disaster preparedness and resilience goals.

Leadership and ownership

In interviews, it was common for subjects to note the lack of leadership around disaster mitigation and resilience planning. They were unsure of whose role it was to convene stakeholders (leadership), while being unsure of how the responsibility for this work was distributed (ownership).

Transportation

Rural counties are large, containing thousands of acres of public and private land. The sheer distance, report interviewees, makes it difficult to convene stakeholders to beginning planning for resilience, let alone in responding to a disaster. Large distances are going to make disaster response and recovery difficult, as critical (and likely scarce) supplies of fuel, food and medicine must be brought in from outside the region.

Community awareness for resilience

While the pandemic has increased community awareness of the specific disaster that is a global health pandemic, many interviewers found that there was not energy or even awareness of what to do about other critical risks.

IV. Conclusion

This assessment builds almost 200 personal interviews in six rural Oregon Economic Development Districts (EDDs) using The Ford Family Foundation’s “Listen to Learn” framework. The IPRE/RARE research team learned a lot through this process. Residents of all regions came together to address challenges related to the pandemic. EDDs and EDOs collaborated in unprecedented ways, pivoting to provide vital support to struggle businesses throughout the state.

While there are many successes to be celebrated, the pandemic also laid bare issues of systemic inequity. Households of fewer means struggled to cope with stay home orders that required parents to become childcare providers, teachers, and workers. These impacts were particularly hard felt by minority communities. The pandemic also pointed out the implications of a broadband communication system that left many communities with no service or underserved.

As we reflect on the opportunities for action, it is worth revisiting what this work is and what it is not. What it is a summary of the voices of nearly 200 rural Oregon leaders who experienced the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic. While those voices do not represent the voices of all residents of the areas, they do reflect the valid lived experience of those individuals. Taken together, they paint a picture of the impacts of the pandemic that we think is reflective of what most (but not all) Oregonians experienced. They also identified many barriers to addressing key problems and identified actions for EDDs and EDOs to consider.

Fostering economic and community resilience should be a top priority for EDDs, EDOs, and local governments. This will require investments in areas that have typically been a lower priority for these organizations. It will also require hard work, creativity, and collaboration.

Appendix A. List of Individuals Interviewed

Researchers interviewed 198 members of the rural community, across the six districts included in this study. Interviewees were selected based on their organizational affiliation as well as their familiarity with the community and economic development topics discussed in this report

CCD Business Development Corporation [CCD]

Court Boice, County Commissioner, Curry County
Jodi Fritts, City Administrator, City of Gold Beach
Tamie Kaufman, Mayor, City of Gold Beach
Janell Howard, City Manager, City of Brookings
Jeff Griffin, Port Manager, Port of Bandon
Loree Pryce, City Manager/City Recorder, City of Lakeside
James Edwards, Mayor, City of Lakeside
Terrie Richards, City Administrator, City of Port Orford
Stephanie Patterson, City Recorder, City of Powers
Darin Nicholson, City Manager, City of Myrtle Point
Rodger Craddock, City Manager, City of Coos Bay
Jessica Engelke, Mayor, City of North Bend
David Milliron, City Administrator, City of North Bend
Margaret Barber, Director of External Affairs, Port of Coos Bay
Melissa Cribbins, County Commissioner, Coos County
Charmaine Vitek, Port Manager, Port of Umpqua
Chris Boice, County Commissioner, Douglas County
Steve Dahl, City Administrator, City of Drain
Bette Kheeley, Mayor, City of Oakland
Terri Long, City Recorder, City of Oakland
Courteney Halstead, Executive Assistant, City of Reedsport
Deanna Schafer, City Manager, City of Reedsport
Jennifer Rockwell, Administrative Assistant, Reedsport Chamber of Commerce
Ron Harker, Finance Director, City of Roseburg
John Lazur, Assistant Planner, City of Roseburg
Nikki Messenger, City Manager, City of Roseburg
Debbie Fromdahl, Executive Director???, Roseburg Area Chamber of Commerce

Jerry Gilham, City Administrator, City of Sutherlin
Kristi Gilbert, Community Development Director, City of Sutherlin
Tracy Martz, Executive Director, Sutherlin Chamber of Commerce
Sean Negherbon, City Administrator, City of Myrtle Creek
Joanna Bilbrey, City Recorder, City of Myrtle Creek
Lonnie Rainville, Community Development Director, City of Myrtle Creek
Katy Bernal, President, Myrtle Creek Chamber of Commerce
Dawn Russ, City Recorder, City of Glendale
Kathleen Wilson, City Manager/City Recorder, City of Riddle
Mark Bauer, City Manager, City of Winston
Rhonda Rasmussen, City Administrator, City of Yoncalla
Brandi Gross, Canyonville Chamber of Commerce
John Dimof, Blue Zones Project Umpqua
Max Gimbel, Associate Director, The Ford Family Foundation
Michelle Martin, Director of Community and Economic Empowerment, NeighborWorks Umpqua
Susie Johnston-Forte, Executive Director, Downtown Roseburg Association

Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council [COIC]

Stewart Frichtman	President	BellaTazza
Katy Brooks	President	Bend Chamber of Commerce
Gwenn Wysling	Executive Director	Bethlehem Inn
Rutila Galvan-Rodriguez	Director, Family and Youth Partnerships	Better Together
Brenda Comini	Regional Early Learning Hub Director	Better Together
Carolyn Meece	RDO	Business Oregon
Andrea Breault	Transportation Director	Cascades East Transit
Donna Mills	Executive Director	Central Oregon Health Council
Chuck Arnold	Director	Redmond Urban Renewal Agency
Jay Patrick	City Councilor	City of Redmond
Hayley Riach	Emergency Services Coordinator	Deschutes County Emergency Services
Heather Ficht	Executive Director	East Cascades Works
Caprielle Foote-Lewis	Sisters Area Manager	Economic Development for Central Oregon
Katrina Van Dis	Executive Director	High Desert Food and Farm Alliance
James Cook	Board Member	Homeless Leadership Coalition
Brad Porterfield	Executive Director	Latino Community Association
Elaine Knobb-Seasholtz	Director, Strategy and Development	Mosaic Medical
John McLeod	President	Mt. Bachelor
Sonia Capece	HomeSource Director	Neighbor Impact
Autumn Rackley	Housing Stabilization Manager	Neighbor Impact
Damon Runberg	Regional Economist	Oregon Employment Department
Kelly Sparks	Vice President	Oregon State University Cascades
Adam Krynicki	Director	Oregon State University Co-Lab
Ken Betschart	Director	Small Business Development Center
Kristine McConnell	Vice President, Industry Relations	Visit Central Oregon

Greater Eastern Oregon Development Corporation [GEODC]

Josy Chavez	HR Specialist	Umatilla School District
Patty Dorroh	Commissioner	Harney County
Andrea Testi	Director	SBDC- TVCC
Randy Jones	Eastern Oregon Regional Solutions Liaison	Oregon Department of Environmental Quality
Torrie Griggs	Executive Director	Boardman Chamber of Commerce
Debbie Radie	VP Operations	Boardman Foods
Gail Nelson	Economic Development And Tourism Coordinator	Umatilla County
Adam Brown	City Manager	City of Ontario
Erin Carpenter	Project Director	Eastern Oregon Workforce Board
John Valachovic	Managing Consultant	OMEP
Lisa Kopetski	Owner	Magic Years Day Care
Jose Garcia	Executive Director	New Horizon
Ryan Neal	Executive Director	Port of Morrow
Kalie Davis	Director of Workforce Development	Port of Morrow
Lisa Mittelsdorf	Director of Economic Development	Port of Morrow

Mid-Columbia Economic Development District [MCEDD]

Andrea Klaas, Executive Director, Port of The Dalles

Pat Albaugh, Executive Director, Port of Skamania

Dan Bubbs, President, Gorge.net

Robb Kimmes, President, Skyline Hospital

Hannah Brause, Director, Washington State University Extension

Hannah Ladwig, Communications and Outreach Manager, GorgeGrown

Jordan Haas, Food Security Coalition Coordinator, GorgeGrown

Ashley Thompson, Extension Specialist, Oregon State University Extension

Greg Price, Director, Small Business Development Center

Dr. Marta Cronin, President, Columbia Gorge Community College

Jarett Gilbert, Vice President of Instructional Services, Columbia Gorge Community College

Heather Ficht, Executive Director, East Cascades Workforce

Kevin Waters, Executive Director, Skamania Economic Development Commission
Emily Reed, Network Director, Columbia Gorge Tourism Alliance
Lynn Burditt, Area Manager, US Forest Service
Lizzie Keenan, Regional Specialist, Travel Oregon
Mark Zanmiller, CEO, Sightline Productions
Dave McClure, Director, Klickitat Economic Development
Darren Michaels, Vice President, Columbia Gorge Winegrowers Association
Julie Gilbert, Agent, Copperwest Real Estate, Mid-Columbia Association of Realtors
Lisa Farquaharson, President, The Dalles Area Chamber of Commerce
Buck Jones, Marketing Specialist, Columbia River Inter Tribal Fish Commission
Amy Martinez, Chief Executive Officer, South Central Washington Workforce
Angie Weiss, Executive Director, Skamania Chamber of Commerce
Lilliana Justo-Bello, Community Health Worker, The Next Door, Inc.

Northeast Oregon Economic Development District [NEOEDD]

Lea Hoover, Director of Administration and Strategic Services, Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative
Jessie Huff, State Energy Coordinator, USDA Oregon Rural Development
John Holman, General Field Representative, Rural Utilities Service – Telecommunications Programs, USDA Rural Development
Joseph Basile, Renewable Energy Project Manager, Wallowa Resources Community Solutions Inc.
Kate Harbour, Outdoor Recreation and Trail Development Coordinator/RARE Participant, Eastern Oregon Visitors Association (EOVA)
Alana Carollo, Executive Director, EOVA
Suzannah Moore-Hemann, Executive Director, Union County Chamber of Commerce & Visitors Information Center
Courtney Crowell, Eastern Oregon Regional Solutions Coordinator - Regional Solutions, Office of the Governor, State of Oregon
Lauren Kolojejchick-Kotch, Program Manager, Rural Development Initiatives (RDI)
Nate Davis, Program Manager, RDI
Brian S. McDowell, Regional Development Officer for Region 11, Business Oregon (Oregon Business Development Department)
Christine Jarski, Economic Development Director, City of La Grande
Erin Carpenter, Project Director, Eastern Oregon Workforce Board
Jeff Nelson, Advisor, Blue Mountain Community College Small Business Development Center

Kaitlyn Gekeler, Office Specialist, Office of Regional Outreach and Innovation at Eastern Oregon University (EOU) | Business Owner, Sugar Pine Farms and More LLC

Tara Morrell, Interim Deputy Director, Workforce Operations at Oregon Employment Department (WorkSource)

Terry Hopkins, Membership Representative, Oregon Restaurant & Lodging Association (ORLA)

Chantay Jett, Executive Director, Wallowa Valley Center for Wellness

Wallowa Memorial Hospital Employee

Nicolas Powers, Chief Executive Officer, Winding Waters Community Health Center

Trish Brinton, Selling Division Manager, Encompass Health - Home Health & Hospice

Donna Beverage, Commissioner, Union County

Robert Strobe, City Manager, City of La Grande

Susan Roberts, Commissioner, Wallowa County

Marsha Moore, Project Manager, Chrisman Development Inc.

Ann Bloom, Nutrition Education Program Assistant, OSU Extensions

Matt Rippee, District Manager, Oregon Parks and Recreation Department/ Regional Solutions Team

Patrick Wingard, Regional Representative, Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development/ Regional Solutions Team

Randy Jones, Oregon Department of Environmental Quality and Regional Solutions liaison, Oregon Department of Environmental Quality/ Regional Solutions Team

Cassandra Sanchez, EOU Health and Wellness Intern, EOU

Julie Keniry, Program Manager, Rural Engagement and Vitality Center (REV)

Justin Chin, Director of Career Services, EOU - Division of Student Affairs and Career Services

Mendy Clark, Director, Bus, Finance, & Purchasing, Union School District 5

Meredith Lair, Executive Director, Northeast Oregon Area Health Education Center

Tabitha Espina, Assistant Professor of Rhetoric and Composition, EOU

Amy Stubblefield, Executive Director, Safe Harbors

Marika Straw, LGBTQIA+ Advocate & Shelter Manager, Safe Harbors

Denine Rautenstrauch, Head Librarian, Enterprise Public Library

Hannah Voetberg, President, Abundant Life | Organization Founder, Neighbors Together

Liberty Avila, Executive Director, Northeast Oregon Network (NEON)

Building Healthy Families

Tyana Musrasrik-Nanpei, Self Sufficiency Coordinator, Community Connection Northeast Oregon | President, Eastern Oregon COFA Alliance National Network (CANN) | Boardmember, NE Oregon Food Bank

Robert Kleng, Executive Director, Eastern Oregon University Head Start

Tobie Renee Sass, Childcare Development Director, Umatilla Morrow Head Start (UMCHS), Inc – Early learning Division

Angela Bombaci, Executive Director, Nez Perce Wallowa Homeland

Cheryl North Coughlan, Executive Director, Joseph Center for Arts and Culture

Gwendolyn Trice, Executive Director and Founder, Maxville Heritage Interpretive Center

Chalene Harshman, Quality Improvement Specialist and Focused Child Care Coordinator, Malheur Education Service District - Child Care Resource & Referral

Theresa Martinez, Eastern Oregon Child Care Resources Coordinator, Malheur Education Service District

Kathleen Ackley, Executive Director, Wallow Land Trust

Larz Stewart, Development Director, Wallowa Resources

Christopher Rich, Eastern Oregon Regional Economist, Oregon Employment Department

Temporary/Transient Lodging Business

Amanda Martino, Conservation Director, Blue Mountain Land Trust

Robin Maille, Assistant Professor of Practice, Family & Community Health/SNAP-Ed and OSU Extension Service

Chris Evans, Community Development Coordinator, Oregon Department of Human Services

Oregon Cattlemen's Association

Wallowa County Hay Growers Association

Mark Coomer, Relationship Manager and VP, Northwest Farm Credit Services

Diane M. Daggett, Broker, Ruby Peak Realty

Katy Nesbitt, Director, Wallowa County Natural Resource Director | Director, Wallowa County Economic Development Director

Robert Seymour, Senior Director Finance/Chief Financial Officer, Grand Ronde Hospital

Shae Talley, Area Manager, J-U-B Engineers, Inc

Caryn Appler, Eastern Oregon Outreach Manager, Energy Trust of Oregon

Bryan Tweit, Executive Director, Hatch/Launch Pad Baker | Economic Director, Baker County Economic Development

Brandy McIntosh, Executive Director, MayDay, Inc.

Millwork Company

South Central Oregon Economic Development District [SCOEDD]

Ginger Casto, Executive Director, Lakeview Community Partnership

Katie Jameson, Field Coordinator, The Ford Family Foundation

Darin Rutledge, Executive Director, Downtown Klamath Falls Association

Linda Woodley, Executive Director, Rural Klamath Connects

John Rademacher, President & Board Member, Chiloquin Visions in Progress & Klamath County School District

Kat Rutledge, Executive Director, Klamath & Lake Small Business Development Center

Justin Lair, Executive Director Klamath IDEA & Small Business Owner

Hallie Neupert, Business Management Department Chair, OregonTech, Business Department Chair

Jessie Hecocta, Relationship Manager, Healthy Klamath & Klamath Tribal Council

Thom Batty, Business Owner, Tall Town Bike & Camp/Darrvin Electric

Maria Ramirez, CHIP Housing Stakeholders Committee, Cascades Health Alliance

Annette Liebe, Regional Solutions Coordinator, State of Oregon, Regional Coordinator

Katie Swanson, Local Agriculture Producer, Sweet Union Farm & Klamath Farmer's Online Marketplace

Kelsie Randall, Local Rancher, Box R Beef & Klamath Farmer's Online Marketplace

Kay Neumeyer & Isaac Nunn, City of Malin

Cathy Stuhr, Executive Director, Chiloquin Community Builders through Chiloquin Visions in Progress

Larry Holzgang, Regional Development (Klamath & Lake) Officer, Business Oregon

Niki Sampson, Executive Director, Klamath & Lake Food Bank

Heather Ficht, Executive Director, East Cascades Works

Nick Johnson, Executive Director, Lake County Resources Initiative