



CAPACITY MATTERS

A 20-Year Review of the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board's
Operating Capacity Investments



Range monitoring. credit: South Fork John Day WC.

JUNE 2023

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Acknowledgments

We thank the grantee organizations who participated in the survey and interviews for their time. We also wish to particularly thank our Core Project Committee, consisting of key Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board and Oregon Department of Agriculture project support leads (Courtney Shaff, Ken Fetcho, Eric Nusbaum, Marganne Allen, and Karin Stutzman). We also thank the Advisory Group, chaired by OWEB and ODA, which consisted of a selected group of council and district leadership, including Kyle Waggoner (Umatilla SWCD), Rob Hoshaw (Long Tom WC), Amy Stiner (South Fork John Day WC), Herb Winters (Gillam SWCD), Dave Downing (Upper Willamette SWCD), and Kelly Timchak (Lower Rogue WC/Curry Watersheds). Anna Santo and Heidi Huber-Stearns of the Ecosystem Workforce Program at the University of Oregon assisted with initial project concepts and secondary data collection. Lauren Nguyen of the University of Oregon assisted with data collection and management. Eric M. White of the USDA Forest Service Pacific Northwest Research Station assisted with estimation of the economic contribution of operating capacity grants. This project was funded in whole by the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board.



Marganne Allen, the Agricultural Water Quality Program Manager with ODA, played an essential role in supporting this project with her expertise and experience in water quality management. She passed away in March 2023. We are grateful for the opportunity to have worked with her.

Acronyms

BEF	B onneville E nvironmental F oundation	ODA	O regon D epartment of A griculture
BIPOC	B lack, <i>I</i> ndigenous, and P eople of C olor	OGMS	O regon W atershed E nhancement B oard's G rant M anagement S ystem
BPA	B onneville P ower A dministration grant	OPSW	O regon P lan for S almon and W atersheds
DEI	D iversity, E quity, and I nclusion	OrCP	O regon C onservation P artnership
DEQ	O regon D epartment of E nvironment Q uality	ORS	O regon R evised S tatutes
DM	D istrict M anager	OSU	O regon S tate U niversity
ED	E xecutive D irector	OWEB	O regon W atershed E nhancement B oard
FAAP	F ocus A rea A ction P lan	OWRI	O regon W atershed R estoration I nventory
FIPs	OWEB's F ocused I nvestment P artnership program	PCSRF	P acific C oastal S almon R ecovery F unds
FTE	F ull-Time E quivalent	P-TA	OWEB's P artnership T echnical A ssistance program
GIS	G eographic I nformation S ystems	RCPP	R egional C onservation P artnership P rogram (NRCS grant program)
GWEB	G overnor's W atershed E nhancement B oard	SIA	S trategic I mplementation A rea
HR	H uman R esources	SOW	S cope of W ork
JDBP	J ohn D ay B asin P artnership	SWCC	S oil and W ater C onservation C ommission
MOU	M emorandum of U nderstanding	SWCD	S oil and W ater C onservation D istrict
NGO	N on- G overnmental O rganization	TMDL	T otal M aximum D aily L oads
NOAA	N ational O ceanic & A tmospheric A dministration	UO	U niversity of O regon
NOWC	N etwork of O regon W atershed C ouncils	UWSN	U pper W illamette S tewardship N etwork
NRCS	N atural R esources C onservation S ervice	WA	W atershed A ssociation
OACD	O regon A ssociation of C onservation D istricts	WC	W atershed C ouncil
OCEAN	O regon C onservation E ducation and A ssistance N etwork		

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

for A 20-Year Review of the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board's
Capacity Investments



Outreach table at City of Cottage Grove Tree Giveaway Arbor Day Celebration. credit: Coast Fork Willamette WC.

Executive Summary

Over the past 20 years, the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) has provided Operating Capacity grants to watershed councils (“councils”), and in close coordination with Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA), to Soil and Water Conservation Districts (“districts”) across the state.



The underlying theory for this capacity funding assumes *“that investment in districts and councils will increase their ability to purposefully and effectively act and interact within their spheres and influence and thus effect measurable and meaningful change in the health of watersheds.”*¹



¹ Request for Proposals #691-1013-19, p. 5

OWEB’s 2018 Strategic Plan further emphasizes the importance of community capacity and strategic partnerships. To evaluate the impact of this funding on councils and districts and help inform future capacity-building investments, OWEB engaged a team from Oregon State University and the University of Oregon to conduct a 20-year programmatic review of Operating Capacity grants provided to councils and districts. A secondary intent of this evaluation is to support best practices for capacity investment funding and identify potential needs for training and guidance for lead council and district staff and boards. We found that many challenges and opportunities were common across councils and districts, and as such, we only point to differences between these when relevant. To better understand factors affecting organizational capacity, we gathered data across five capacity dimensions of (1) internal governance and operational practices, (2) resources obtained and leveraged, (3) adaptive and resilient governance, (4) types of partners engaged, and (5) partnership types engaged in.

From 2011 to 2021, OWEB has provided over \$80 million in Operating Capacity grants to councils and districts. With this essential funding, councils and districts have leveraged over \$140 million from OWEB’s Open Solicitation grants alone to engage in restoration and conservation projects, which supports state agencies in meeting state-wide restoration and conservation goals; and have leveraged multiple other sources of public, private, and philanthropic funds. These initial OWEB funds generated additional economic activity as councils and districts purchased products and services; and as employees of councils, districts, suppliers, and service providers spent their income. The initial investments for councils supported \$64.5 million of total economic activity (the original investment plus additional multiplier effect economic activity) and initial investments in districts translated into \$64.1 million of economic activity.

Given the influx of federal funding from the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act (P.L.117-18) and the 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (P.L.117-58), it is particularly important to understand what helps build or reduce organizational capacity at the local level to better position grantees for these resources, since community-based organizations are essential partners in implementing federally funded restoration and conservation work on the ground.

Figure 1. Summary of Operating Capacity Investments to Councils and Districts from 2011 to 2021.²



² We chose to calculate OWEB’s total operating capacity investments from 2011 to 2021 because in July 2011 OWEB began to provide capacity funds directly to districts, so we could easily track how much funding each district and council has received, over a consistent time period.

Approach

This project applied a mixed-methods and participatory approach including:

- an online survey
- a phased case study process
- capacity programs review with partner and advisory input

Online Survey

From April - May 2022, a survey was administered to all councils and districts that have received Operating Capacity grants from OWEB and ODA. We had an 81% response rate from councils and a 91% response rate from districts. We collected data on number of employees and shared staffing arrangements for the purpose of arranging grantees into similar organizational types (i.e., capacity typology) to frame sampling of case study grantees. We also gathered data on factors affecting organizational capacity including: (1) internal governance and operational practices, (2) resources obtained and leveraged, (3) adaptive and resilient governance, (4) types of partners engaged, and (5) partnership types engaged in.

Phased Case Studies

From June 2022 - February 2023, we engaged in a phased case study approach examining a selection of councils and districts with different staffing levels, in rural and urban contexts, and with varying resource classes. To categorize grantees by resource classes, we looked at Oregon Watershed Restoration Inventory (OWRI) and OWEB Grant Management System (OGMS) data from 1997 to 2019, calculated total cash spent and in-kind contributions for each grantee, and used quartile statistical breakpoints to define resource classes. Then, we conducted a 20-year grant document review of 20 selected grantees, to develop in-depth organizational profiles to identify common themes. Using these profiles, we further selected seven case study grantees for in-depth interviews with lead staff, board members, and partner organizations. These strategies helped us create a process that was achievable within our project timeline, while improving the applicability of results.

Capacity Programs Review

We gathered available information about similar capacity-building programs that invest in local organizational capacity (i.e., administrative, financial, technical) in natural resources and conservation management in the United States to identify applicable lessons learned for OWEB's capacity grant context ([Refer to Appendix 5](#)).

These findings are intended to provide useful knowledge about what fosters and impedes local organizational capacity, and how these factors can lead to upward or downward trajectories for organizational health. They are relevant to lead staff and board members of councils and districts, OWEB and ODA staff, conservation-focused statewide service providers, the OWEB Board, the Soil and Water Conservation Commission (SWCC), and other state agencies and external funders interested in collaborating to ensure that collective investments and capacity resources are coordinated and effective.

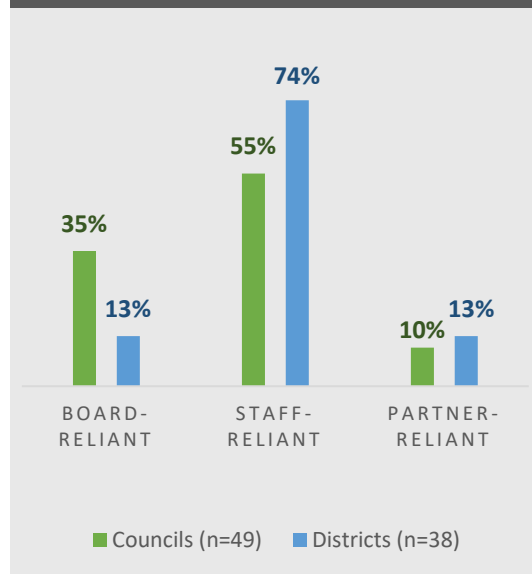
Grantee Organizational Models

We used Dr. Margerum’s “Reliance Model of Collaborative Capacity” to categorize grantees into three broad types based on staffing levels and shared staffing arrangements (journal article in review).

Board-reliant indicates lower staffing levels with a greater reliance on a working board. **Staff-reliant** indicates higher staffing levels where staff fulfill more management capacity and boards are encouraged to take a more strategic role. **Partner-reliant** indicates shared staffing arrangements with another organization, with staff also fulfilling more management roles.

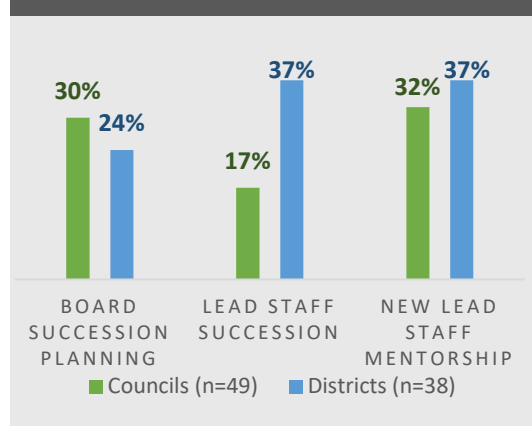
Most grantees were staff-reliant (**Figure 2**). Most districts were staff-reliant, including all districts with a permanent tax rate. This may indicate that tax bases may help districts shift towards greater staffing capacity. However, it is important to acknowledge that while taxes serve as an ongoing base of support, organizational management is just as essential.

Figure 2. Comparing Council and District Typology Results



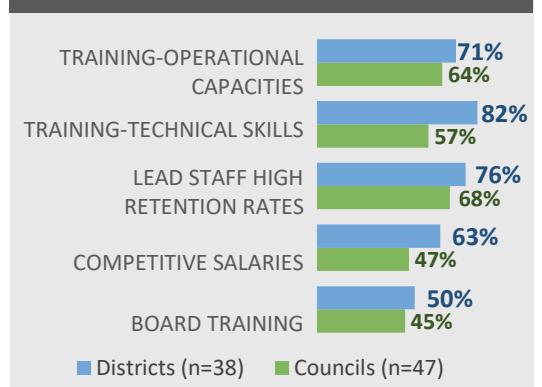
Overall, most councils and districts responded that they had written personnel and operational policies (>95%) with clear position descriptions for staff (>83%) and board members (>76%) that were well-implemented (> 89%). Additionally, 66% of districts and 70% of councils indicated that their board took initiative in managing the organization. However, regardless of capacity typology, less than half of councils and districts indicated that they had succession planning or mentorship for lead staff, or succession planning for board members (**Figure 3**). Furthermore, only 45% of councils and 50% of districts indicated that they had board member training for financial management, facilitation, or personnel management.

Figure 3. Comparing Council and District Capacity for Board and Lead Staff Transitions



Taxing districts, which were all staff-reliant, were more likely to respond that they had competitive salaries and benefits (90%), access to adequate equipment and technology for virtual meetings (90%), and staff training on key operational capacities (e.g., project management, contracting, and administrative tasks; 80%) compared to non-taxing districts. Regardless of whether a district had a tax base, they still led councils in reported competitive salaries and benefits, staff training on technical skill building and key operational capacities, and lead staff retention rates (**Figure 4**). This may indicate that access to competitive wages and more training may support retention rates.

Figure 4. Comparing Councils and Districts in Training, Staff Salaries, and Retention Rates





Outreach and coordination with local loggers. credit: North Coast Watershed Association.

Operating Capacity Grant Uses

We found that councils and districts commonly used Operating Capacity grants for project development by building networks to develop joint priorities and obtain funding. This included creating ad-hoc regional groups as a collaborative approach to sharing training, information, and resources. This demonstrates the value of allowing greater flexibility for Operating Capacity funding. Additionally, it is important to recognize that project development can be a multi-year process depending on project complexity and the number of partners involved. This points to an essential function of Operating Capacity grants in providing on-going support for project development through paying staff time to meet with and coordinate with partners until they obtain a grant with these partners to engage in implementation of restoration and conservation projects. Councils also used capacity grants as cash match for restoration and conservation projects, which has helped leverage additional federal grants that require match funding. Councils also described using Council Capacity funds to participate in local boards and committees to identify and cultivate relationships with potential future board members to advance their goals. All councils and districts used the Operating Capacity grants for operational support (e.g., administrative staff), as well as training for staff and boards. This was essential for maintaining their day-to-day operations and governance. Districts indicated an interest in increased flexibility in how they could use their District Capacity funds for staffing and capacity building. Currently, 75% of District Capacity funds are directed towards districts' Scope of Work and Focus Area Action Plan, while 25% are for operations. Council Capacity grants have become more flexible over time, where any expense eligible in other OWEB grants is also eligible in a Council Capacity Grant. Councils have appreciated this flexibility and have found it extremely valuable to use funds based on their self-determined needs.

We learned that Operating Capacity grants have positively impacted communities' local economies, supported the completion of restoration and conservation projects, and helped build capacity among local partners. Investing in local councils and districts around Oregon through the Operating Capacity grants program has enabled progress toward state-wide restoration and conservation goals. Furthermore, many grantees expressed that there is insufficient external capacity-building funding in the face of rising costs and inflation. Without Operating Capacity grants, many councils and districts would not be able to maintain their operations because restoration and conservation work can require months or years of networking, planning, and leveraging projects—which cannot be charged to restoration and conservation project grants. The potential loss of councils and districts would have negative repercussions on conservation efforts throughout the state. State and federal natural resource agencies have also depended on councils and districts for their ability to leverage funding, implement projects, and provide community connections.



Aspen workshop in an old schoolhouse. credit: South Fork John Day WC.

Critical Governance Characteristics

Governance refers to how an organization is managed and led, which relates to board and lead staff roles and responsibilities, along with the structures and processes they use for defining priorities and making decisions. Together, these have a large influence on grantees' functioning and trajectory. Across case study grantee organizations, we found three critical characteristics that affected the operating capacity of councils and districts. These were (1) lead staff capacity and retention, (2) board composition and recruitment, and (3) strategic planning.

Key Factors in Effective Governance:

- Lead staff capacity and retention is supported by board engagement and regional networks.
- Targeted board recruitment supports organizational direction.
- Strategic and annual work plans establish and reinforce organizational priorities.

#1: Lead Staff Capacity and Retention: Board Engagement and Formation of Regional Networks Supports Lead Staff

Lead staff have played an important role in grantees' stability and overall trajectory. Crucial lead staff skills include leadership, relationship building, personnel management, fiscal management, grant writing, and conservation knowledge. Factors affecting lead staff capacity and retention include level of board engagement and supportive regional networks.

- (1) Level of board engagement:** Effectively engaged boards provided lead staff with organizational direction for strategic planning, supported lead staff decision-making and development of organizational policies/procedures, contributed guidance on lead staff work plans, and provided fiscal oversight. An effective board was one that is neither too engaged (i.e., micromanaging lead staff), nor too disengaged (i.e., not providing sufficient organizational direction and support for lead staff). Engaged boards were better able to manage lead staff turnover, often supporting operations and interim staff through the transition. Lead staff have used various strategies to improve board engagement and help train them in

their role, since not all board members have a background in organizational management. Some lead staff incorporated 15-minute educational content and skills training into board meetings to help them understand their roles and responsibilities. Other lead staff invited agency personnel or other relevant experts to provide project updates and upcoming funding opportunities to help boards understand regional priorities and inform their decision-making.

- (2) **Regional networks:** In rural and urban settings, some grantees established regional networks, using OWEB Focused Investment Partnership (FIP), Partnership Technical Assistance (P-TA), or the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Regional Conservation Partnership Program (NRCS RCPP) grants, which provided additional support for grantees experiencing lead staff transitions. By building on pre-existing relationships, some grantees developed more formalized partnerships with shared by-laws, memorandums of understanding (MOUs), and other governing documents. The intentionality of these partnerships has allowed for increased points of connection between local conservation partners for shared peer learning through regular meetings. Furthermore, the consistency of these meetings and the development of group agreements built trust, which led to some grantees becoming more transparent with each other about how they operated and managed finances. This helped develop a culture that leveraged the diversity of knowledge and expertise of the group for mentorship, rather than relying solely on past lead staff or the board chair.

Challenges: Lead Staff Turnover and Capacity

Turnover of lead staff was challenging for many grantees to overcome and sometimes led to a downward cycle of additional challenges, including issues with recruitment and replacement. Precipitating factors for lead staff loss included: unsustainable workload, lack of joint organizational priority setting between staff and board for strategic plans or annual work plans, and a board that was too engaged (i.e., micromanaging of lead staff) or too disengaged (i.e., not providing sufficient organizational direction or fulfilling essential board functions as described in Table 14). Some lead staff found themselves in a position of managing a challenging workload, while navigating their concerns around pay, health, and retirement benefits, which have been affected by rising costs of living and housing in Oregon. Because of this, some lead staff have left to seek out positions with increased pay and benefits.

Other grantees experienced challenges with organizational stagnation, wherein lead staff lacked the necessary capacity, skills, or training to lead organizations at a particular point in time. In these situations, board members: (1) lacked skills or experience in personnel and organizational management, (2) were disengaged and did not recognize what skills were needed for lead staff positions, and/or (3) faced difficulties of attracting qualified candidates due to the grant-funded nature of lead staff positions, and lack of health and retirement benefits and competitive wages, coupled with the challenges of hiring in rural communities. Rural areas, like the rest of Oregon, have faced rising housing values and increased costs of living in part associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Some interviewees indicated that effects from organizational stagnation made partners less likely to work with them, which led to missed opportunities for project work and funding. These challenges were particularly acute for board-reliant organizations, while staff and partner-reliant organizations had more opportunity to support advancement of lead staff from within.

#2: Board Recruitment: Targeted Recruitment Helps Grantee Organizations Work Towards Strategic Plan Goals

Boards have held an essential role in organizational direction setting. Essential board member skills included reviewing and updating governing policies and procedures, fiscal oversight and management, and providing guidance and support to lead staff. As part of their operational strategy, some grantees engaged in targeted board recruitment through ongoing, intentional participation in local committees, other boards, or foundations; and by attending local events. This helped access existing community networks to identify potential board members, encourage their broader involvement in projects, and cultivate future candidates. They looked for individuals who could help them move closer to the organization's strategic plan goals and strengthen communication/information sharing across agencies and industries. To pay for lead staff and other project managers' time to participate in these activities, some grantees built their operational budget over time as part of their operational strategy.

In addition, some districts have innovated around the legal requirements for board directors. Typically, to become a zone director, an individual must own or manage at least ten acres of land, while at-large or associate directors do not have these same criteria.³ Some districts recruited non-landowners or those who own or manage less than ten acres of land to become at-large or associate directors to address issues of diversity or lack of expertise in board composition. After one year in this position, they became eligible to serve as zone director if they were a registered voter who lived within the zone they represented and had a conservation plan approved by the district.

Challenges

Common board recruitment challenges have included issues with identifying and recruiting members with the time and capacity to commit, with organizational/personnel/fiscal management skills, and from a diversity of perspectives. These were difficult to overcome since they have been a product of established OWEB and ODA board requirements or reflective of community contexts. Furthermore, when board positions were posted or spread by word of mouth only, organizations typically had a less diverse board. These challenges were particularly acute in rural areas with a limited pool of potential board members, or key potential board members were already serving in numerous community volunteer roles.

#3: Strategic Planning: Joint Priority Setting Supports an Upward Trajectory

Strategic plans support decision-making between lead staff, boards, and partners. Here, we refer to individual organizations' strategic plans, rather than strategic action plans used to coordinate goals and actions across multiple organizations for a large geographic area as part of an OWEB-FIP, P-TA, NRCS RCPP grant, or others. The planning processes for an individual organization's strategic plan are shaped by regional contexts, vary based on organizational structure, and serve distinct purposes depending on how the organization is managed. Because strategic plans have different functions depending on these factors, it is necessary to account for these nuances. For some organizations, an effective strategic planning process took a more detailed approach. The plan incorporated diverse perspectives and needs and engaged relevant technical expertise to identify geographic project and/or programmatic priorities that could result in tangible benefits or improvements with clearly

³ Refer to ODA's SWCD Guidebook Chapter 3: Conservation District Directors (updated 12/2022) for more information as well as ORS 568.560(2) and (3) to see the eligibility requirements for a person to become a conservation district director.

measurable objectives. These priorities were sometimes laid out as short, medium, and long-term goals, with identifiable potential partners and funders. These organizations typically had access to more regional funding opportunities. For other organizations, an effective strategic planning process needed a wider scope and to be broader in nature. These plans included organizational history, land uses, and limiting factors, which allowed the organization to be more adaptable to emergent funding opportunities that arose. These organizations typically had fewer regional funding opportunities available. The annual work plans were then derived from these strategic plans to incorporate more detail to guide daily operations and establish geographic project and/or programmatic priorities between lead staff and board. Both approaches supported organizational efficiencies through joint priority setting by lead staff and board, which simultaneously led to a shared understanding of what constituted a manageable project workload based on staffing capacity. This knowledge also streamlined pursuit of key partnerships and funding sources.

However, it is important to recognize that for a strategic plan to gain momentum and foster an upward organizational trajectory, lead staff still needed to be able to move from planning to action by creating “small wins” early on that demonstrated commitment and developed trust that the organization would be reliable and consistent in following through on their plans. This was the case regardless of whether the organization had greater access to funding opportunities or not, though, of course having more funding opportunities in a geographic area was helpful for this.

Challenges

When strategic plans and/or annual work plans lacked specificity in their objectives and measures, the plans did not offer enough organizational direction setting for lead staff to develop projects, seek out partnerships, or identify funding sources. Without joint organizational priority by lead staff and board members, some organizations faced increased lead staff workload, which often led to burn-out from a lack of direction for their strategic and/or annual work plans. In other instances, some organizations faced difficulties with board micromanagement, which led to organizational gridlock and departure of lead staff.



Post-wildfire team efforts. credit: Upper Willamette Stewardship Network.

Building Partnership Capacity and Working through Challenges

Partnerships helped organizations to learn from the expertise and experiences of adjacent councils, districts, and other local conservation partners to develop and implement restoration and conservation projects. Over time, some partnerships evolved as they created shared understanding of needs and resources available. These types of partnerships were able to move beyond project-to-project planning and work towards the development of larger-scale restoration and conservation projects. Partnership opportunities and challenges varied in different geographic areas and landownership and land contexts. When neighboring landowners differed in their priorities, it could be challenging to implement a program of work across a landscape. However, councils and districts, as community-based organizations, were positioned to find common goals and work towards landscape-scale restoration and conservation.

Councils and districts built their partnership capacity through participation in city or county committees and other local boards to establish their local reputation and contribute to the community. They also developed strategic plans with key partners to establish priorities for their watersheds through identification of key players (e.g., landowners, city/county officials/boards, public events/outreach) and formation of joint priorities to acquire funds. Additionally, they created diverse models of partnership to meet the needs of those involved through resource-sharing arrangements (e.g., staff positions, staff expertise, equipment) and establishment of group networks.

Challenges

Common partnership challenges that councils and districts faced included partner staff transitions and challenging relationship histories. To address partner staff transitions, lead staff oriented new agency personnel to joint project grants and shared priorities. Some invited agency partners to attend board meetings or one-on-one settings. Challenging partnership histories were typically addressed by lead staff efforts to rebuild the relationship through action, such as funding to work together on a project or monitoring to collect and share information for project development. These approaches supported each other's capacity since each organization had access to complementary skills, knowledge, and community connections necessary for restoration and conservation.

Top Funding Strategies and Challenges

Councils and districts have used various strategies to acquire funding for projects and operating capacity, including from unrestricted and longer-term sources. It is important to keep in mind that these strategies vary by resources available in a given geography. To successfully obtain project funding, top strategies included assessment of staffing and organizational capacity to inform which grants to pursue and when, and development of a strategic plan and funding opportunities spreadsheet.

- To strategically pursue grants, organizations defined what a feasible project workload would look like based on their staffing and project capacity. This structure helped them to implement project work in a timely manner, which built partner trust and attracted additional funding opportunities. Additionally, some described how they learned to build additional capacity into grant applications by budgeting for more project management time and accounting for future costs and expenses (e.g., staff wages and materials), as grants allowed. Strategic plans helped to identify watershed goals and related project priorities, which then helped organizations position themselves for grant opportunities. Some organizations also created a funding opportunities spreadsheet that connected their strategic plan to various funders' priorities. They periodically updated this to keep track of grants, deadlines, and key contacts to maintain awareness of upcoming opportunities. Some also described fostering regional networks using partnership grants (e.g., OWEB-FIP, P-TA, or NRCS RCPP) to formalize partnerships, share information and resources, coordinate projects, and identify partners for project cash match. The designation of a partnership coordinator was particularly useful for identifying landscape-level restoration and conservation funding for multiple organizations.
- To develop unrestricted funding sources, organizations networked in their communities to learn about diverse funding opportunities and build partnerships helped them to find longer-term funding to supplement OWEB's Operating Capacity grants. Examples include: (1) annual federally negotiated indirect cost rate agreements, (2) local government budgets, (3) local community institutions that sponsor non-profits (e.g., local banks, grocers, breweries), and (4) fundraising.

Challenges

Councils and districts faced challenges inherent to with navigating a variable funding landscape and lack of external programmatic capacity funding not tied to specific projects. External funders' priorities change over time, which can lead to loss of reliable funding sources. Additionally, some geographic areas of the state have had greater access to funding opportunities, such as Bonneville Power Administration grants (BPA), district tax bases; species-specific funds for salmon, steelhead, and greater sage-grouse; and other agency regional funding priorities. Further, some rural communities have fewer available local organizations to partner with on projects and/or a lack of local government funding for conservation, and therefore, fewer cash match options for grants. This also ties into difficulties some rural organizations described of finding and retaining qualified staff, which had indirect impacts on their ability to manage and obtain larger restoration and conservation grants. Some have developed and participated in regional partnerships to help mitigate these challenges to the extent possible.



Golden paintbrush, Threatened and Endangered Species. credit: John D. Anderson, cc.

Proposed Recommendations: Agencies and Service Providers

Coordinate Across Agencies and Improve Cross-Agency Understanding of Grantees' Needs

Although several agencies and service providers offer technical assistance and support for grantees (e.g., NOWC, OrCP, OCEAN, and the SWCD Operations Specialist), there is a need to improve awareness of this. As the COVID-19 pandemic altered what was provided over the past few years, and as more in-person events are happening, it is important to re-introduce and offer additional opportunities for peer networking and information sharing. Additionally, we heard interest from council and district staff in connecting directly with OWEB and ODA staff. Hosting regional in-person forums could be particularly beneficial for organizations in more rural areas, who typically must travel further and face greater travel costs for professional networking opportunities. Lastly, new lead staff may have different needs than those who have been in their positions longer. This emphasizes the ongoing importance of mentorship and peer learning networks to create information exchanges and learn from each other's experiences at all stages.

Potential Strategies

For councils, NOWC could play an enhanced role in supporting regional peer forums, since their board includes regional representatives, and they support regional peer networking groups open to all councils. Additionally, they have created a NOWC Insider Webinar series that covers a variety of topics (e.g., nonprofit board governance, legal issues, financial best practices, partnership opportunities, fundraising strategies, and other relevant topics) with content experts. However, these services are currently limited to councils who are paying NOWC members, because the organization depends on membership dues for funding its part-time coordinator and operations currently. OWEB could also engage with ODA's SWCD Operations Specialist's skills to develop regional round-table trainings for lead staff on management and operations for councils, in addition to those already offered to districts.

Topics for Capacity Building

Content that grantees most wanted to learn more about included OWEB-specific and general grant writing and reporting requirement courses; fiscal management and terminology; guidance on developing unrestricted funding sources to maintain critical operations; best practices or examples of organizational policies, procedures, and bylaws; board management and education; handling personnel management and lead staff transitions; and navigating the management of multiple projects, with a balanced project workload for lead staff. It is important to acknowledge that lead staff may not have a background in project management or organizational management, which are essential functions for this position, and have often needed to learn on-the-job.

Strategic Planning

Requiring greater specificity in strategic plans or annual work plans as part of OWEB Council Capacity Grant Merit Criterion 2, depending on the functions of these plans for the organization, could allow for objectives and measures for how councils are identifying and implementing watershed restoration and conservation while engaging with partners (refer to [Proposed Metrics Scorecard](#) in Section VII-C, page 52 for more nuances). It is important to acknowledge that strategic planning processes take time, energy, and resources, which can draw capacity from an organization's other activities and project work. As such, organizations may benefit from additional technical and financial support from OWEB and ODA and other supportive organizations to assist their strategic planning and annual work plan processes to incorporate diverse perspectives and needs and engage relevant technical expertise for identifying priorities. Regional peer learning forums, webinars, and conference sessions may help grantees, particularly lead staff, gain valuable insight into project development, management, and implementation, while making the best use of OWEB's various grants in project design (e.g., technical assistance, stakeholder engagement, monitoring, and restoration).

Board Management

Grantees may benefit from board training guidance, either using existing resources available from ODA, NOWC, and Oregon Conservation Partnership (OrCP), or development of new guidance through these outlets. Considering that lead staff capacity and turnover are common organizational challenges, it is important to continually promote relevant and available board resources for lead staff awareness. Offering these via webinars would allow for increased opportunities to meet the scheduling needs of retired or working board members. Key training areas included strategic plans, organizational policies and procedures, fiscal responsibilities, and personnel management of lead staff.

Staff Benefits and Retirement

A key aspect of lead staff succession planning and staff retention is pay, health and retirement benefits, which are further challenged by the rising costs of living and housing, even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is challenging for councils and districts as smaller grant-funded organizations to afford group health insurance for their staff. It can be challenging to maintain organizational longevity when lead staff leaves to seek out positions with increased pay and benefits. Additionally, based on the survey results, less than half of councils and districts indicated that they had succession planning or mentorship for lead staff, or succession planning for board members. Furthermore, only 47% of councils and 63% of districts indicated that they had competitive salaries and benefits compared to similar types of organizations. Grantees may benefit from a toolkit or an online resource page (including relevant resources from OCEAN, OACD, NOWC and OrCP webinars) for how to

incorporate health and retirement benefits into their organization. Regional peer learning forums, CONNECT and OACD conference sessions, and access to legal experts may be helpful as well.

Coordinating with and Educating External Funders on the Significance of Longer-Term Funding

By reviewing other capacity building programs, we learned that other funders (e.g., the Ford Family Foundation and the Wilburforce Foundation) acknowledge the need to support long-term partnerships through long-term granting, and the importance of collaborating among funders to ensure that collective investments and capacity resources are coordinated and effective. OWEB and ODA have provided ongoing, programmatic support for 20 years to councils and districts' efforts in improving local watershed quality and health. OWEB has developed longer-term funding strategies to help support grantees in partnership capacity and larger landscape-scale restoration (P-TA and FIP grants), while NRCS has developed RCPP grants to support collaboration with other councils and districts for landscape-scale conservation projects with private landowners. External funders often see OWEB and ODA as essential funding partners in getting restoration and conservation work done on the ground through these locally based councils and districts. As such, OWEB can play a role in educating funders on the significance of longer-term grants to work toward landscape-scale restoration and conservation.



Restored floodplain in Morrow County. credit: EJ Davis.

CAPACITY MATTERS

REPORT

for A 20-Year Review of the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board's
Capacity Investments



Students survey macro-invertebrates during a Salmon Watch field trip on the North Santiam River. credit: Marion SWCD.

I. Introduction

Since 1997, OWEB has directly invested in the operating capacity of watershed councils (i.e., councils) and soil and water conservation districts (i.e., districts) enabling these entities to collaboratively foster locally based, voluntary restoration to protect or restore native fish or wildlife habitats or restore natural watershed functions to improve water quality or stream flows. This was generated by the [Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds \(OPSW\)](#) which focuses on “restoring our native fish populations and the aquatic systems that support them to productive and sustainable levels that will provide substantial environmental, cultural, and economic benefits.”



¹ Under ORS 541.890(15) and 541.910, councils are “designated by a local government group convened by a county governing body, to address the goal of sustaining natural resource and watershed protection, restoration and enhancement within a watershed.”² Districts are political subdivisions of state government, i.e., municipal corporations, governed by ORS 568. Districts have existed in Oregon for over 75 years, with the first established in 1939 as South Tillamook.

¹ <https://www.oregon.gov/oweb/resources/pages/opsw.aspx>

² OWEB FY 21 - 23 Spending Plan

OWEB's theory of change underpinning the provision of Operating Capacity grants:
If councils and districts receive resources to operate and meet merit criteria, they will be able to better sustain healthy watersheds.

Specifically, capacity investments will “increase [groups’] ability to purposefully and effectively act and interact within their spheres and influence.”³ With that capacity, the councils and districts pursue and achieve their mission and purposes of engaging communities, stimulating economies, mobilizing partners, affecting the systems that interact with watersheds, and ultimately achieving meaningful, measurable, sustainable improvements in the health of Oregon watersheds. OWEB’s 2018 Strategic Plan further emphasizes the importance of community capacity and strategic partnerships. Strategy 3.1 recommends completing a qualitative and quantitative evaluation of past council and district capacity investments.⁴ In 2020, OWEB initiated this project to evaluate these Operating Capacity grants from the past 20 years and assess what contributes to or impedes capacity, engaging a research team from Oregon State University (OSU) and the University of Oregon (UO). The intent of this evaluation is to identify best practices for capacity investment funding, as councils and districts face evolving changes and challenges in their roles and funding.

Figure 1. Defining Organizational Capacity.



Questions

- How have grantees used Operating Capacity grants and what are the outcomes of the Operating Capacity grant program?
- How have grantees used Operating Capacity grants to leverage partnerships?
- What can we learn about what builds or reduces an organization's capacity?
- What guidance and best practices can be developed to help councils and districts increase their capacity and overcome organizational challenges?
- How can we refine approaches for capacity investment monitoring and tracking?
- How can findings inform future funding strategies to sustain and build operating capacity, while also helping to convey to other funders the importance of programmatic capacity?

³ Request for Proposals #691-1013-19, p. 5.

⁴ <https://digital.osl.state.or.us/islandora/object/osl%3A470647/datastream/OBJ/download/2018.pdf>

I.A. History of Operating Capacity Grants

The majority of OWEB’s grant funding comes from two sources: Measure 76 Lottery funds and Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Funds (PCSRF). For each biennium, OWEB’s spending plan is approved by the OWEB Board in the first fiscal year of the biennium. In the second fiscal year of the biennium, the spending is updated based on updated revenues, and additional PCSRF funding awarded from NOAA. OWEB’s core grant programs include: (1) Open Solicitation, (2) Focused Investments, (3) Operating Capacity, and (4) Small Grants. In this project, we focused on the Operating Capacity grants provided to councils and districts.

Council Capacity Grants

For over 20 years, OWEB has provided Council Capacity grants to watershed councils. OWEB does not create or oversee councils, but does have statutory discretion to provide Council Capacity grants based on whether councils reflect a balance of watershed interests and display the ability to both protect and improve watershed quality. Councils are also expected to engage a high level of citizen participation in developing and implementing watershed action programs based on ORS 541.910. Council Capacity grants have gone through many iterations over the past 20 years with varying criteria, evaluation metrics, and review processes (**Figure 2**). In 2014, OWEB adopted criteria that emphasized effective governance, evolving strategic plans, and action in watershed restoration and conservation activities with active partner engagement. [Refer to Appendix 1](#) for a detailed description of how OWEB’s funding has changed over time.

Figure 2. OWEB Funding Strategies.

BLANKET FUNDING Evaluation Criteria: Scope of Work and Accomplishment of Descriptions. Funding Distribution: Equal distribution across regions.	1997-2003	MODIFIED DECISION MATRIX WITH RANKED SCORING Eligibility Criteria: Unchanged. Evaluation Criteria: Merit base simplified (council organization and council effectiveness) with a consensus scoring review process. Following this, OWEB staff applied weighted factors, with council effectiveness /accomplishments weighted more heavily. Funding Distribution: Unchanged	2007-2015
CATEGORICAL FUNDING Evaluation Criteria: n/a Funding Distribution: Each category had a pre-designated funding range.	2003-2005	CATEGORICAL FUNDING Eligibility Criteria: (1) Designated as a watershed council by a local government. (2) Has previously received a Council Capacity grant, and which serves an area that is the same or larger than the geographic area served by a council or group of councils as of 2013 with only 1 applicant per geographic area & includes a minimum population of 500 within its designated boundaries. (3) Adopted action plan by a council-governing body that meets OWEB requirements. (4) 501(c)(3) registered with Oregon, or written fiscal sponsorship agreement with a 501(c)(3), SWCD, city, county, or tribal government. (5) Adopted bylaws/charter & policies/ procedures that include standard best-practice governance provisions. (See Appx. 1 for full description of eligibility criteria in rule.) Evaluation Criteria: Merit based (effective governance/management, progress in planning, progress in on-the-ground restoration, progress in stakeholder engagement for watershed restoration) with OWEB staff review based on these criteria as well as their institutional knowledge of council, e.g., project performance history. Applications considered independently of other councils, i.e., no ranking process. Funding Distribution: Full funding if council meets all criteria; reduced funding if council meets some criteria; no funding if council’s performance is inadequate.	2015-Present
DECISION MATRIX WITH RANKED SCORING Eligibility Criteria: Introduced to provide funding only to councils that have been designated by local government, does not overlap the bounds of another OWEB council grantee, with a council that reflects or seeks to represent a balance of interests. Evaluation Criteria: Merit based (council organization, past performance on capital and non-capital projects, proposed work plan/watershed complexity) with an intensive review process and applicant ranking system based on level of effectiveness and accomplishments. Funding Distribution: Quantitative approach using a standard formula that resulted in a graduated point scale. For example: The highest-scoring council received the highest base funding.	2005-2007		

District Capacity Grants

District Capacity grants are provided to all 45 Soil and Water Conservation Districts. The purpose of District Capacity grant funding is to support districts' efforts to work with landowners to conserve natural resources and to help ODA implement the Agricultural Water Quality Management Program. This program was passed by the Oregon Legislature in 1993 to prevent and control water pollution on agricultural lands in support of the federal Clean Water Act. In 2011, after the passage of Measure 76, which precluded OWEB from passing Oregon Lottery funds to other state agencies, OWEB and ODA entered into an interagency agreement for the funding and oversight of District Capacity grants. OWEB administers District Capacity grants. ODA reviews and approves district work plans, assesses progress on these work plans, notifies OWEB if payments should be approved based on work progress, and provides oversight of districts.

District Capacity funds are designated for the (1) Scope of Work (SOW) and (2) District Operations Fund. SOW funds are used to directly support working with partners and landowners for the conservation and protection of natural resources. This includes "technical assistance and community engagement for the restoration and protection of native fish and wildlife, watersheds, and water quality through implementation of Agricultural Water Quality Management Area Plans."⁵ District Operations Funds are used for capacity support to help SWCDs comply with ORS, conduct business, and provide assistance to landowners and partners. Unlike Council Capacity grants, there are no criteria or evaluation metrics to designate funding, however ORS 568 outlines criteria to be eligible for funding. This includes (1) current annual and long-range business plans submitted to ODA for comment, (2) annual reports and audits of activities, and (3) an annual meeting of the landowners of the district.

Operating Capacity Funds Distributed and Leveraged from 2011 to 2021

From 2011 to 2021, OWEB has provided over \$80 million in Operating Capacity grants to councils and districts. With this essential funding, councils and districts have leveraged over \$140 million from OWEB's Open Solicitation grants alone to engage in restoration and conservation projects, which supports state agencies in meeting state-wide restoration and conservation goals.

Figure 3. Summary of Operating Capacity Investments to Councils and Districts from 2011 to 2021.



⁵ OWEB FY 21 - 23 Spending Plan

Between July 2011 to December 2021, OWEB provided capacity grants of \$47.4 million to watershed councils and \$47.1 million to SWCDs. These initial OWEB funds generated additional economic activity as councils and districts purchased products and services; and as employees of councils, districts, suppliers, and service providers spent their income. Assuming that 80% of the spending of OWEB funds by councils and councils remained in Oregon and that the economic activity multiplier rate for these organizations is 1.7⁶, the initial investments for councils supported \$64.5 million of total economic activity (the original investment plus additional multiplier effect economic activity) and initial investments in districts translated into \$64.1 million of total economic activity. All values are based on the value of a dollar in 2023.

I.B. Timeline of Key Points in the History of Councils and Districts

Figure 4. History of Councils and Districts

<p>The Governor’s Watershed Enhancement Board (GWEB) starts providing council funding and ODA starts providing district funding as a result of implementing SB1010, the Agricultural Water Quality Management Act.</p>	<p>1997</p>
<p>OWEB adopts Council Capacity grant rules.</p>	<p>2004</p>
<p>OWEB starts administering District Capacity grants. Educational activities shift from the “grants” side of OWEB’s budget to the “operating” side.</p>	<p>2011</p>
<p>OWEB adopts new Council Capacity grant rules, raising the bar for eligibility and merit criteria.</p>	<p>2014</p>
<p>OWEB allows Council Capacity funds to be used for more staff than just the council coordinator or executive director.</p>	<p>2015</p>
<p>OWEB drops Council Capacity grant match from 25% match to \$1 to make requirements between councils and districts more equal. (Districts have a \$1 match requirement.)</p>	<p>2018</p>
	<p>2021</p>
<p>Measure 66 passes, designating 7.5% of net lottery proceeds for salmon, watershed, and habitat restoration ⁷</p>	<p>1998</p>
<p>OWEB was created to administer lottery proceeds from Measure 66 and replaced GWEB.</p>	<p>1999</p>
<p>As a result of passing Measure 76, OWEB began administering District Capacity grants in collaboration with ODA.</p>	<p>2010</p>
<p>ODA adjusts SOW funds so that 75% goes to district-wide tasks and 25% to specific geographic areas (Focus Area), in collaboration with the Oregon Association of Conservation Districts (OACD), districts, and the Soil and Water Conservation Commission (SWCC). ⁸</p>	<p>2012</p>
<p>OWEB allows Council Capacity funds for any expenses allowed in OWEB budget categories.</p>	<p>2017</p>
<p>ODA adjusts SOW funds so that districts can choose if they want 25% to go to specific geographic areas or if they want 100% of funds to go to district-wide tasks.</p>	<p>2021</p>

⁶ Hibbard, M. and Lurie, S., 2006. Some community socio-economic benefits of watershed councils: A case study from Oregon. *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*, 49(6), pp.891-908.

⁷ <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2021R1/Downloads/CommitteeMeetingDocument/236274S>

⁸ OWEB FY 21 - 23 Spending Plan

I.C. Context of Capacity Funding Criteria and Service Providers

Given that this evaluation is offering a 20-year review of OWEB’s Operating Capacity grants, it is important to be aware of how OWEB has modified its approach to providing Operating Capacity grants and evaluation criteria over the years (For more detail, see [Appendix 1](#)). Changes in Operating Capacity grants administration have direct impacts on grantees, and changes in evaluation criteria can affect grant distribution. Additionally, this can inform the development of recommendations for refining OWEB’s future investment strategies.

In addition to providing Operating Capacity grants, OWEB and ODA staff assist local councils and districts directly, and contribute to, or partner with various forms of conservation- focused peer learning support through state-wide service providers. These include peer learning networks, affinity groups, conferences, trainings, webinars, and professional networking opportunities. It is important to understand how OWEB, ODA, and service providers contribute to peer learning to help inform and identify useful strategies that councils and districts can benefit from, while being aware of what support is already available (**Figure 5**; for more complete descriptions, see [Appendix 2](#)).

Figure 5. Agency Staff Support and Service Providers.



⁹ Note: OWEB no longer has this position. This work has been incorporated into OWEB’s Monitoring and Reporting Program Manager role.



Touring a restored wetland. credit: Marion SWCD.

II. Project Approach

Our approach was guided by our desire to produce actionable knowledge. We recognized and wanted to draw on the decades of experience and awareness that agency, council, and district staff possess. In developing a strategy for data collection, we considered the challenges and opportunities related to the COVID-19 pandemic, wildfire, drought, and other environmental issues that demand the time of local grantees, OWEB, and ODA. We focused on using existing data as a primary information source to decrease the burden of asking participants to provide information that was already publicly available. For information we could not obtain elsewhere, we carefully developed targeted approaches to new data collection. Importantly, this process aimed to be responsive to, and not extractive of, the local councils and districts who are the intended beneficiaries of this effort.

The Core Project Committee consisted of key OWEB and ODA project support leads (Courtney Shaff, Ken Fetcho, Eric Nusbaum, Marganne Allen, Karin Stutzman). We held meetings every one to two months to obtain input and refine project design, and engaged in ongoing communication as needed. Additionally, Dr. Rich Margerum, who serves as a NOWC board member, led communication with NOWC's Board. Courtney Shaff led communications with Vanessa Green, NOWC's Executive Director, as well as updating the SWCD Commission on this OWEB sponsored project that involves districts. Eric Nusbaum led communications with districts on the project during his annual district trainings.

The Council and District Advisory Group, chaired by OWEB and ODA, consisted of a selected group of council and district leadership, including Kyle Waggoner (Umatilla SWCD), Rob Hoshaw (Long Tom WC), Amy Stiner (South Fork John Day WC), Herb Winters (Gillam SWCD), and Kelly Timchak (Lower Rogue WC/Curry Watersheds). We engaged this group in April 2020 and again in April 2022 to obtain feedback on the study plan to discuss strengths, weaknesses, areas of particular interest for the agency and partners, and timelines. We focused on capacity dimensions and metrics for examination, as well as availability of proposed data sources, and feedback on proposed deliverables. In May 2023, we engaged the Advisory Group again to ground-truth our findings and recommendations, and determine the most effective ways to disseminate and apply what was learned.

II.A. Capacity Dimensions

This study took a multi-step, mixed-methods and participatory approach (**Figure 6**) to examining five dimensions of organizational and partnership capacities through a framework that tailored metrics to the watershed restoration and conservation contexts in which councils and districts work (**Table 1**). Importantly, the evaluation accounted for how grantees need different capacities at different stages of their development, in different social contexts, and for different activities.

Table 1. Proposed Capacity Dimensions, Indicators, and Metrics.

Capacity Dimension	Indicator	Evidence of Ability to
ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY		
Internal Governance & Operational Practices	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) # of FTE staff/board members and shared staffing arrangements. 2) Presence/absence of bylaws/charter, governing policies and procedures, adopted action plans. 3) Presence/absence of functional accounting systems. 4) Grantee type (e.g., municipal, nonprofit). 	<p>Manage people and resources</p> <p>Have accountability</p>
Resources Obtained & Leveraged	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Match sources, types, and \$ amounts. 2) Categorize grantees’ ability to obtain and leverage resources (e.g., cash spent and # of projects completed). 	<p>Attract investment and support (crosswalk with partnership capacities)</p>
Adaptive & Resilient Governance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Presence/absence/use of transition plans and practices, e.g., handover memos. 2) Documentation of institutional memory 	<p>Respond to challenges, changing needs and opportunities</p>
PARTNERSHIP CAPACITY		
Types of Partners Engaged	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Extent, depth, and function of relationships with public, private, landowner, research, and other relevant entities. 	<p>Work with all necessary types of partners relevant to watershed restoration/conservation in a given geography</p>
Partnership Types Engaged In	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Involvement in Focused Investment Partnerships (FIPs), Partnership Technical Assistance (P-TA), NRCS' Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP), cross-boundary partnerships, etc. 2) Participation in a learning network, cooperative partnership, coordinating partnership, collaborative partnership. 3) Tie complexity of partnerships to existing funding opportunities. 	<p>Use partnership types suited to issues and needs at hand</p>

II.B. Study Plan Steps

Figure 6. Study Plan Steps.

Key Informant Interviews	Interviews took place in 2020. Roles included: OWEB Regional Program Representatives, ODA Regional Water Quality Specialists, ODA’s SWCD Operations Specialist, and OWEB’s Monitoring and Reporting Program Manager. These interviews informed the organizational and partnership capacity dimensions and potential metrics that informed the study design, the survey questions for councils and districts, and for triangulating data from case study interviews.
Database of Council and District Characteristics	Develop baseline understanding of organizational and partnership characteristics for each included grantee to the extent possible, as well as static attributes, e.g., OWEB region, county, year formed, etc.
Develop Capacity Investments Narrative Characteristics	Document how capacity funding requirements, criteria, and distribution have changed over time, which can help inform future funding strategies to improve operating capacity.
Classify Councils and Districts by Capacity Typology	Guide classification and typology of grantees to support a representative sample of grantee capacity for case study analysis.
Survey Council and District Grantees	Conducted Qualtrics survey to collect information necessary to apply capacity typology to council and district grantees and develop a baseline of quantitative info about barriers and facilitators of capacity building across grantees.
Case Studies (phased approach)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Case Study Selection: Crosswalk capacity typology (3c) with OWRI and OGMS data, covering 1997 to 2019, to identify grantees with lower, medium, and higher levels of obtaining and leveraging resources.2. Initial Document Analysis: Sample 20 grantees that are a representative percentage of councils and districts across capacity typology, resource class, and OWEB region to create an in-depth profile using existing data, e.g. OGMS grant documents over 20 years (including council support, restoration, technical assistance, monitoring, education, outreach, stakeholder engagement), SOW, FAAP, FIPs, P-TA, OWRI, organizational documents available on council and district websites.3. In-depth Interviews: Select 7 grantees for interviews that are representative of councils and districts across OWEB’s six regions in consultation with the Core Project Committee. Interview questions are informed by in-depth organizational profiles from the initial document analysis. Interviewees included: executive directors, district managers, staff, board members, partner organizations.
External Capacity-Building Program Review	Review of other existing capacity-building programs that invest in local organizational capacity for examples and potential lessons learned.

III. Methods

Data were collected through a survey and a phased case study process. The survey took place between April – May 2022 and was sent out to all 58 councils and all 42 districts in Oregon that receive or have received Operating Capacity grants using OSU’s Qualtrics online survey platform. We designed the questionnaire to collect data on (1) the number of employees and shared staffing arrangements for the purpose of arranging organizations into similar types using Dr. Margerum’s “Reliance Model of Collaborative Capacity” (**Table 1**) and (**2**) factors affecting organizational capacity. Data analysis occurred in two phases. First, we categorized grantees into the capacity typology by adding the number of staff over the past 12 months, including the executive director, district manager, or coordinator; and if these positions were permanent; contracted; and temporary. We also used the organization’s self-description to understand shared staffing arrangements and whether they shared a physical location with another organization. This framed the sampling of grantees for the case studies. Next, we looked at the organizational capacity factors. We used descriptive statistics to examine the percentage of respondents in each response category by: (1) councils and districts, (2) capacity typologies, and (3) taxing and non-taxing districts. Additionally, we calculated the average (mean) response to determine if there was a statistical difference between typologies. Refer to [Appendix 3](#) for more complete descriptions of the methods, as well as for the questionnaire, statistical analysis, and datasets.

Table 2. Typology Classifications.

Board-Reliant Lower staff levels (<3.0 FTE)	→	Staff delivers primary capacity with greater reliance on working board.
Staff-Reliant Higher staff levels (>=3.0 FTE)	→	Staff fulfills most management capacity roles with board taking on more strategic activities.
Partner-Reliant Varied staffing shared with another organization	→	

Next, we implemented a phased case study approach that took place from June 2022 to February 2023. Refer to [Appendix 4](#) for more complete descriptions, as well as for the interview guides.

- **Case Study Selection:** We cross walked the capacity typology with OWRI and OGMS data from 1997 to 2019 to categorize grantees by resource classes using quartile statistical breakpoints.
- **Initial Document Analysis:** We sampled 20 grantees (i.e., 10 councils and 10 districts) that were representative across capacity typologies, a representative proportion of resource classes, and representative across urban and rural areas. To categorize grantees by resource classes, we gathered OWRI and OGMS data from 1997 to 2019, added up total cash spent and in-kind contributions for each organization, and then used quartile statistical breakpoints to define resource classes. Then, we conducted a 20-year grant document review of 20 case study organizations using OGMS grant documents from 1997 to 2019; as well as SOW and FAAP documents from 2015 to 2019; OWEB FIPs, P-TA, and OWRI data, and other documents accessible on organizations' websites. From this, we created in-depth organizational profiles that summarized the history and trajectory of each organization relative to the capacity dimensions described in **Table 1**.
- **In-depth Case Studies:** We selected seven grantees as case studies that were roughly representative of our selection criteria for the initial document analysis in consultation with the Core Project Committee ([See Appendix 4, Table 14](#)). Interviewees included: current and past lead staff, as well as project managers, administrative assistants, board and vice chairs, and top partners.
- **Interview Analysis:** We analyzed the interviews to see how Operating Capacity grants were used related to themes from the capacity dimensions. ([See Appendix 4, Table 15](#)). To validate the findings, we triangulated this data with the key informant interviews and the organizational profiles.

IV. Overall Survey Findings

Respondent Population and Capacity Typology Classification

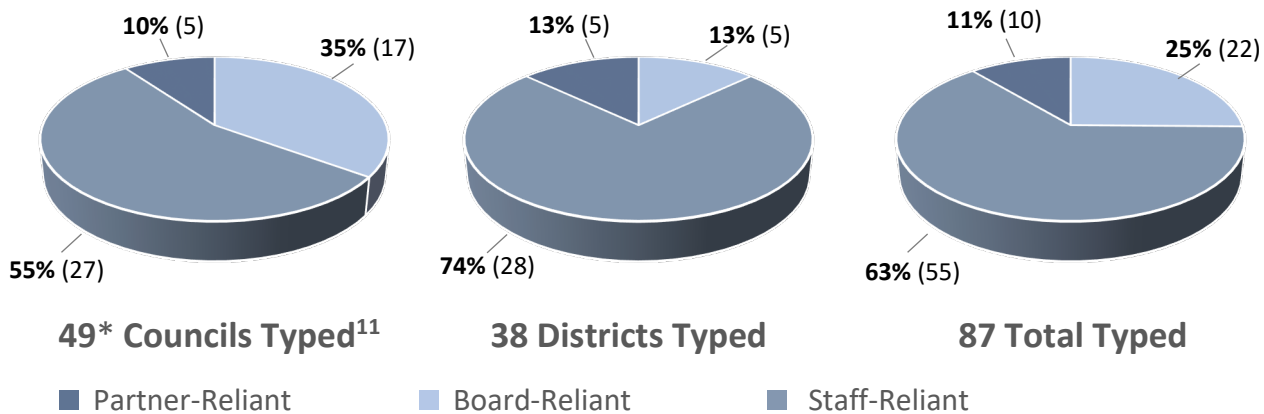
We had a high response rate from councils and districts (85%). There are more councils than districts; however, proportionately more districts responded to the survey (**Figure 6**). Additionally, ten districts have received local taxes, while 18 have not. Refer to [Appendix 3](#) for the full datasets.

Figure 6. Survey Response Rates.



Overall, 87 councils and districts were typed according to the capacity typology (**Figure 7**). Most organizations were staff-reliant, followed by board, and partner types. We expected that partner-reliant organizations would be the least common type given the complexity of sharing staff with another organization, developing joint MOUs, and the degree of commitment that is involved in this kind of partnership. Most districts were classified as staff-reliant and included all districts with a permanent tax rate. In discussion with the Core Project Committee, we discussed that this validated the data based on the working assumption that tax bases help districts shift towards a staff-reliant model. Additionally, it is important to note that because there were a small number of board-reliant districts, as well as partner-reliant types for councils and districts, assessment findings for the level of agreement with statements on factors affecting organizational capacity should be viewed through this lens.

Figure 7. Council and District Capacity Typology Results.



¹⁰ Note: Two additional councils were included in the capacity typology as partner-reliant based on how other respondents answered, but did not complete the survey questions, so they were not included in the overall response rate. Furthermore, three councils stated they were not currently receiving OWEB Operating Capacity grants. These include: Tyron Creek WC, Glenn-Gibson WC, and North Clackamas Urban WC. We included their responses to these questions since it still added relevant knowledge for our study purposes.

¹¹ Note: Two additional councils were included in capacity typology as partner-reliant based on how other respondents answered, which is why this number reflects a higher total than the survey response rate.

Organizational Operations

Overall, most councils and districts responded that they had written personnel and operational policies with clear position descriptions for staff and board members that were well-implemented. Additionally, 66% of districts and 70% of councils indicated that their board took initiative in managing the organization. However, regardless of capacity typology, less than half of councils and districts indicated that they had succession planning or mentorship for lead staff, or succession planning for board members. Furthermore, 45% of councils and 50% of districts indicated that they had board member training for financial management, facilitation, or personnel management. These suggest areas for improving organizational capacity building. Taxing districts, which were all categorized as staff-reliant based on the typology methodology, were more likely to have competitive salaries and benefits (90%), have access to adequate equipment and technology for virtual meetings (90%), and staff training on key operational capacities (e.g., project management, contracting, and administrative tasks; 80%) compared to non-taxing districts, which did not include any staff-reliant types. Regardless of whether a district received local taxes or not, they still led councils in competitive salaries and benefits, staff training on technical skill building and key operational capacities, and lead staff retention rates. This may indicate that access to competitive wages and more training may support retention rates.

Working with Other Local Partners

The majority of councils and districts reported working with other councils, districts, and local partners most of the time to accomplish their goals. Staff-reliant districts and councils were more likely to do so, which may be related to their staff capacity to work with partners compared to board- and partner-reliant types.

Leveraging Operating Capacity Grants

Most councils and districts were seeking opportunities to leverage Operating Capacity grants for additional funding for other OWEB grants (e.g., stakeholder engagement, monitoring, technical assistance, restoration) and to build cooperative partnerships with councils, districts, or other local organizations. Districts more commonly reported leveraging District Capacity grants for stakeholder engagement, monitoring, technical assistance, and restoration grants. However, this was likely because of how District Capacity grants have been structured compared to councils. District Capacity funds have a greater emphasis on the implementation of the Agricultural Water Quality Management Program, with 75% of funds designated toward this. Additionally, based on comments by councils and districts in the survey, there may be an opportunity to help organizations develop unrestricted funding sources, which can help maintain critical operations. Some examples to note included the development of an annual federally negotiated indirect cost rate agreement as well as budgeting for more project time in grant applications to build in additional capacity for projects.

IV.A. Detailed Findings

Organizational Operations

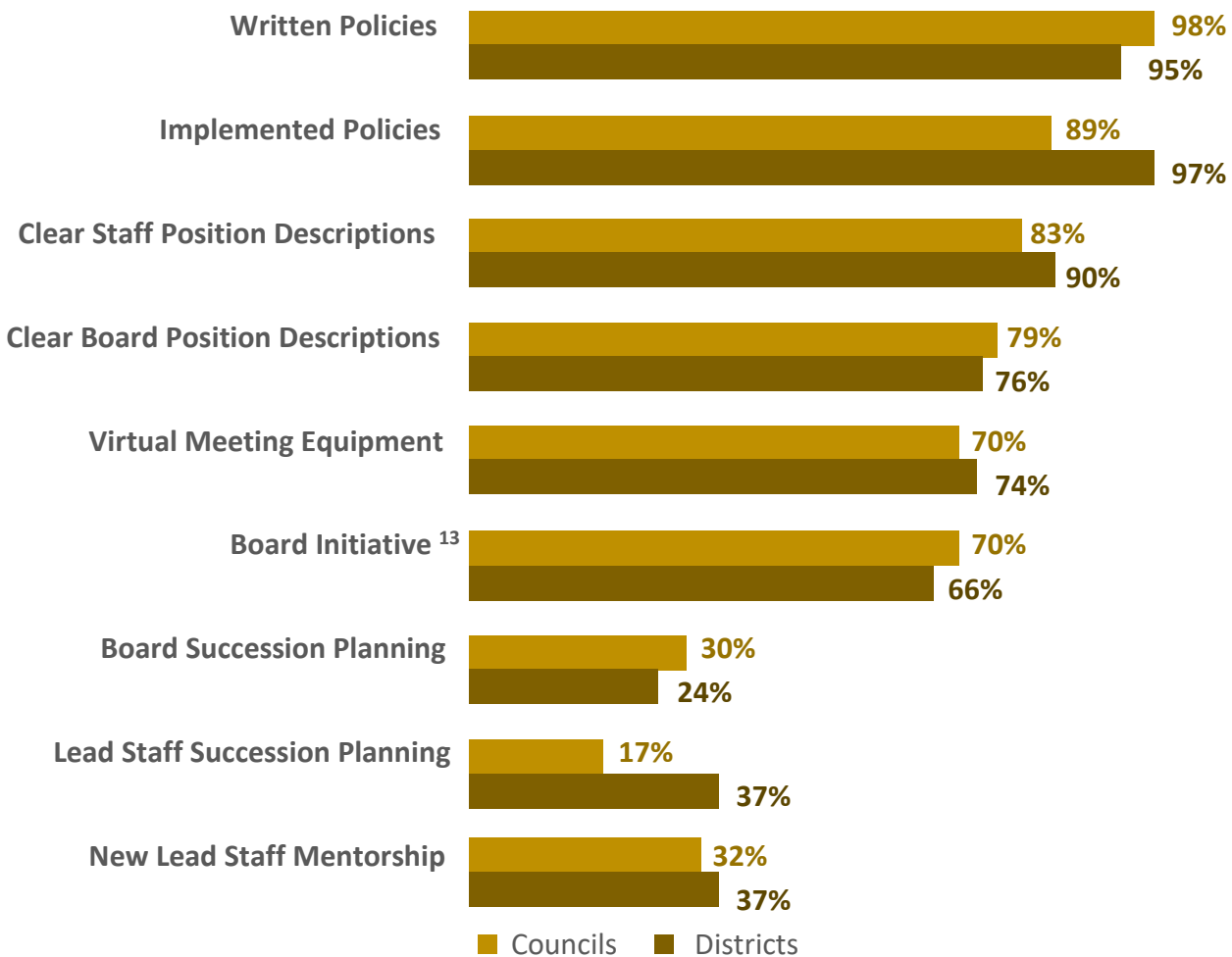
We asked organizations to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with a set of statements focusing on operational policies and procedures. Respondents could choose from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” on a 5-point Likert scale.¹² Next, we compare findings for councils and districts as well as across capacity typologies, and compare differences between districts that received local taxes with those that have not.

¹² In the survey, “agree” was broken down into “strongly agree” and “somewhat agree”. For analysis, these categories were simplified into a single category, “agree”.

Comparing Council and District Operations

Overall, councils and districts were fairly similar in their use of organizational policies and procedures (**Figure 8**). Most councils and districts reported that they had clear board and staff position descriptions, as well as written and implemented policies for personnel and operations. This is likely because OWEB and ODA require grantees to have these in order to receive Operating Capacity grants. Furthermore, by having written policies, policies are more likely to be implemented. In contrast, most organizations did not have written policies or strategies for succession planning or established mentorship structures. Given that these organizations are typically smaller, this was perhaps not surprising. Although many organizations were classified as staff-reliant, it is important to remember that staff-reliant indicated an organization had at least 3 staff members, which is still a small organization. This could also be in part due to the location of these organizations, which are often in more rural areas and may face challenges with hiring staff. Over half of councils and districts stated that their board was actively engaged in managing the organization, which is defined as “Board Initiative” in **Figure 8** below. This may be because over half the organizations were classified as staff-reliant, which can potentially indicate the degree of involvement of the board. When an organization is staff-reliant, the board can engage in the overall direction setting, while staff can focus on the daily tasks. Additionally, most reported having adequate technology for virtual meetings. This is likely a result of adapting to remote work.

Figure 8. Councils’ and Districts’ Organizational Capacities.



¹³ “Board Initiative” was defined as the Board being actively engaged in managing the organization.

Lastly, since councils and districts’ legal organizational structure differed, we asked councils whether they had term limits for board members. 49% of councils had board term limits, while 36% did not. One council respondent commented that term limits greatly improved their board management, compared to other organizations they worked with that experienced leadership stagnation.

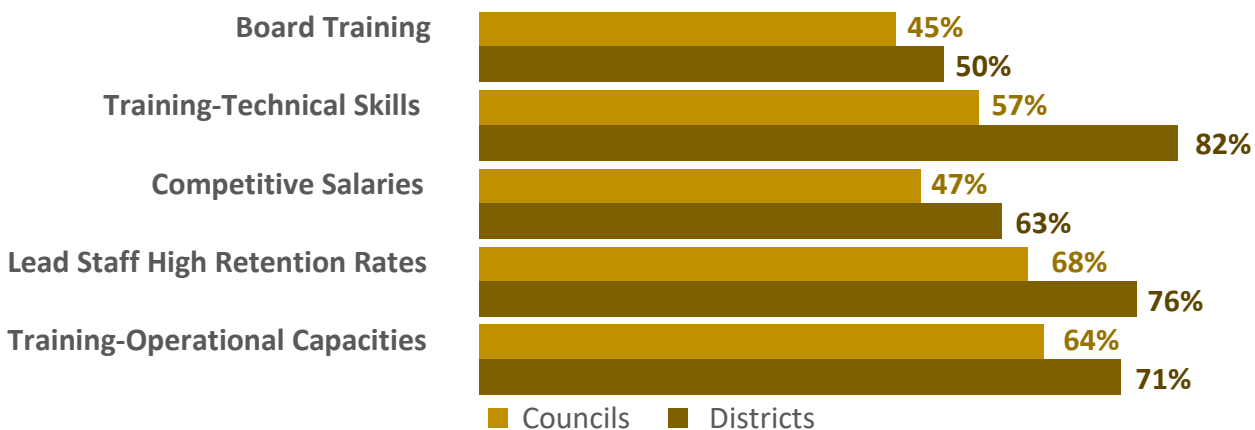
Comparing Council and District Training, Staff Salaries, and Retention

Less than half of councils and districts indicated that their boards received sufficient training for financial management, facilitation, or personnel management (**Figure 9**). District board members have served in elected positions, and typically consist of working landowners who may have insufficient time to participate in trainings. Additionally, they have not been required to participate in the trainings ODA offers to new board members.

Council boards, in contrast, are composed of volunteers. OWEB has required councils to work towards diversification of board members to support organizational management by having members with a varied set of skills, backgrounds, and experiences. However, board recruitment has been challenging in some areas due to a lower number of available and interested participants, which has also made board diversification challenging. Additionally, because board members have served in a volunteer capacity, they have not been required to participate in trainings. Board members may have also lacked the time to engage in trainings, such as agency staff working full-time at another organization or working landowners. Lastly, this may have been because lead staff lacked the time or skills to train board members in these areas.

Less than half of councils indicated that they had competitive staff salaries and benefits compared to similar organizations. This is likely because councils are 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations, and as such, rely on grant funds for much of their services, which can make providing competitive wages challenging. Additionally, with rising housing prices and other costs of living, it can be hard for these smaller organizations to provide competitive wages. More districts than councils had competitive staff salaries and benefits. This was likely influenced by whether or not a district had a tax base. 90% of taxing districts, which included all staff-reliant types based on the typology, responded that they had competitive wages compared to those without a tax base (67%). District staff also more commonly reported receiving training for technical skill building (e.g., GIS) and on key operational capacities (e.g., project management) compared to councils. This could be due to differences in the types of work councils and districts engage in and how their District Capacity funds are structured. District Capacity funds have a greater emphasis on implementing their Agricultural Water Quality Management Program through providing technical assistance with partners and landowners for restoration and conservation projects, with 75% of District Capacity funds directed towards their SOW or FAAP. Additionally, ODA’s Regional Water Quality Specialists have provided districts with technical assistance to implement this program. Lastly, districts also had higher retention rates for lead staff than councils, which was likely tied to having more competitive salaries and benefits, and perhaps from receiving more training.

Figure 9. Comparing Councils and Districts in Training, Staff Salaries, and Retention



Comparing Operations across Capacity Typologies

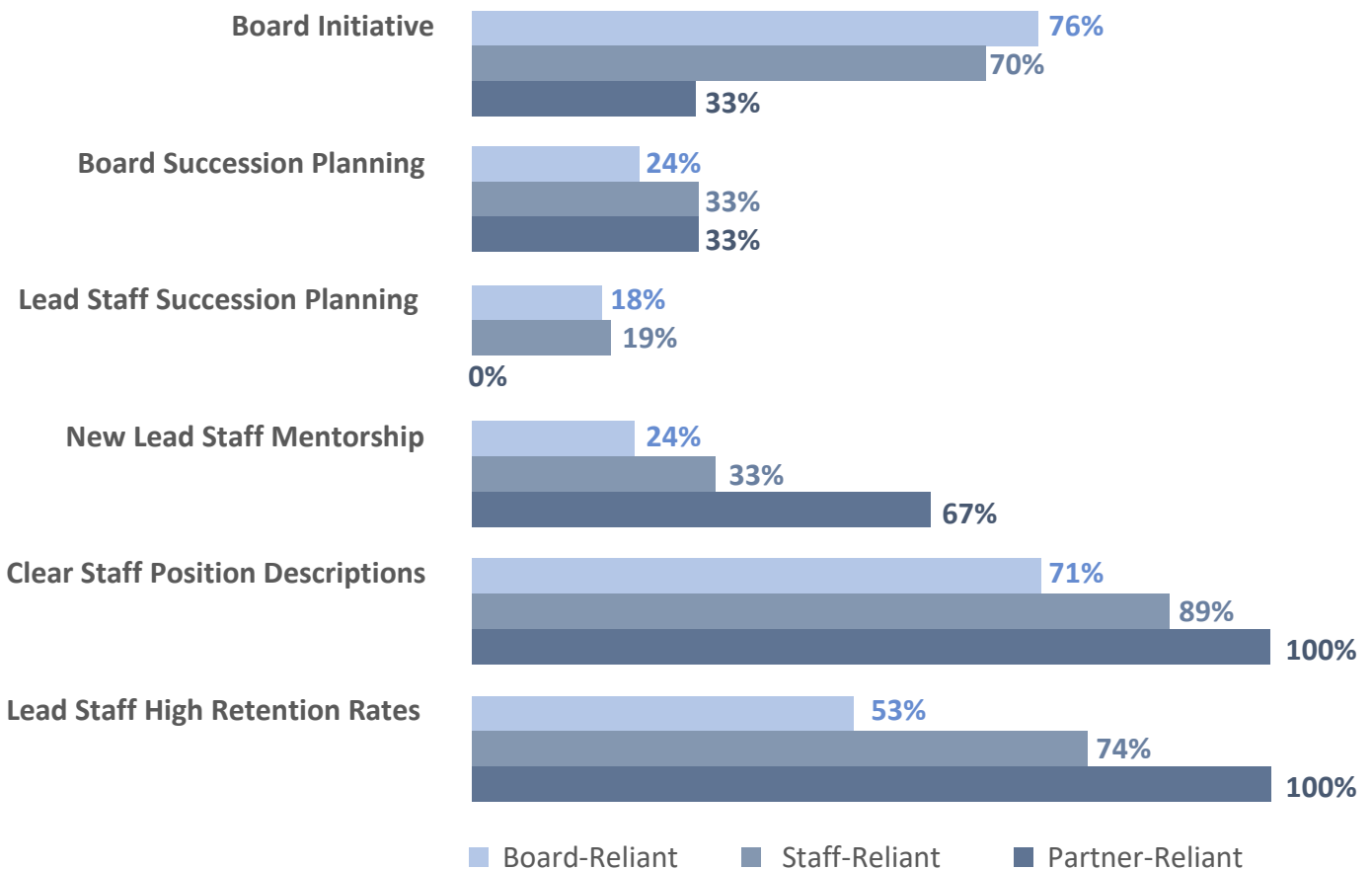
Next, we compared organizations across capacity typologies by looking at the percentages for each type as well as determining the statistical significance for each of these statements. Because of the differences between councils' and districts' legal organizational structure, we compared councils to councils and districts to districts. When we calculated the average (mean) response for each of the statements, the averages were different for several variables, but only a handful of the differences were statistically significant due to the small sample size and variation within the samples. In other words, even though the average scores were different, as a group, the respondents cannot be described as statistically different because there was too much variation within the group.

When comparing staff-reliant, board-reliant, and partner-reliant councils, several averages were statistically different (**Figure 10**).

- Board initiative, or “a board that actively engages in helping manage our organization”, was lowest among partner-reliant councils and significantly different from board- and staff-reliant.
- There were significant differences among the three groups in relation to whether they had clear staff position descriptions, with partner-reliant councils most likely to agree.
- There were also significant differences with respect to retention rates, with partner-reliant councils being significantly higher than both staff- and board-reliant councils.

Although not significantly different from each other, many respondents noted that they lacked board and staff succession planning and new coordinator mentorship.

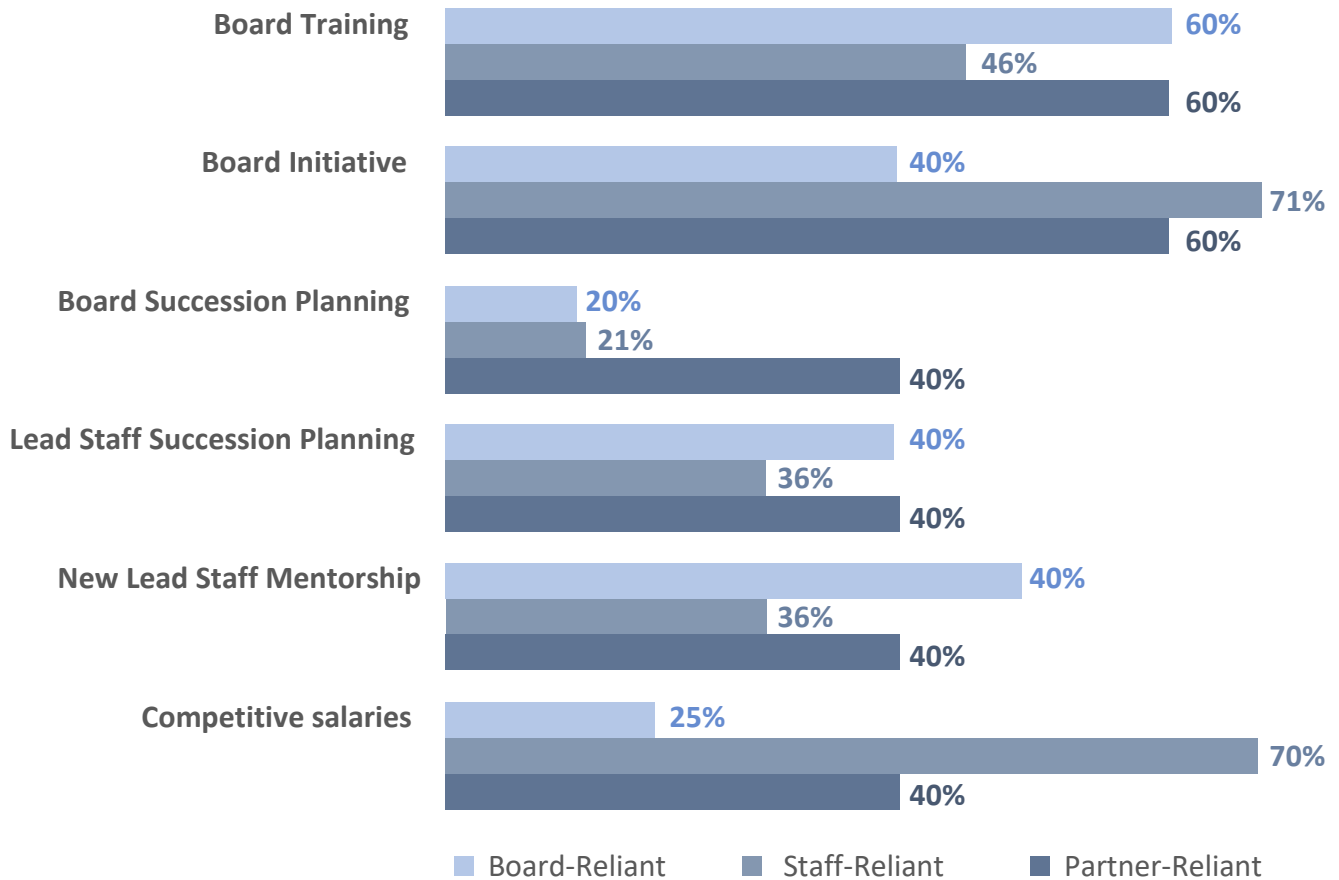
Figure 10. Differences in Organizational Capacity between Board, Staff, and Partner-Reliant Councils.



Due to the small sample of some groups and variability for districts, there were fewer statistically significant differences to note from the survey, but several trends were worth highlighting (**Figure 11**).

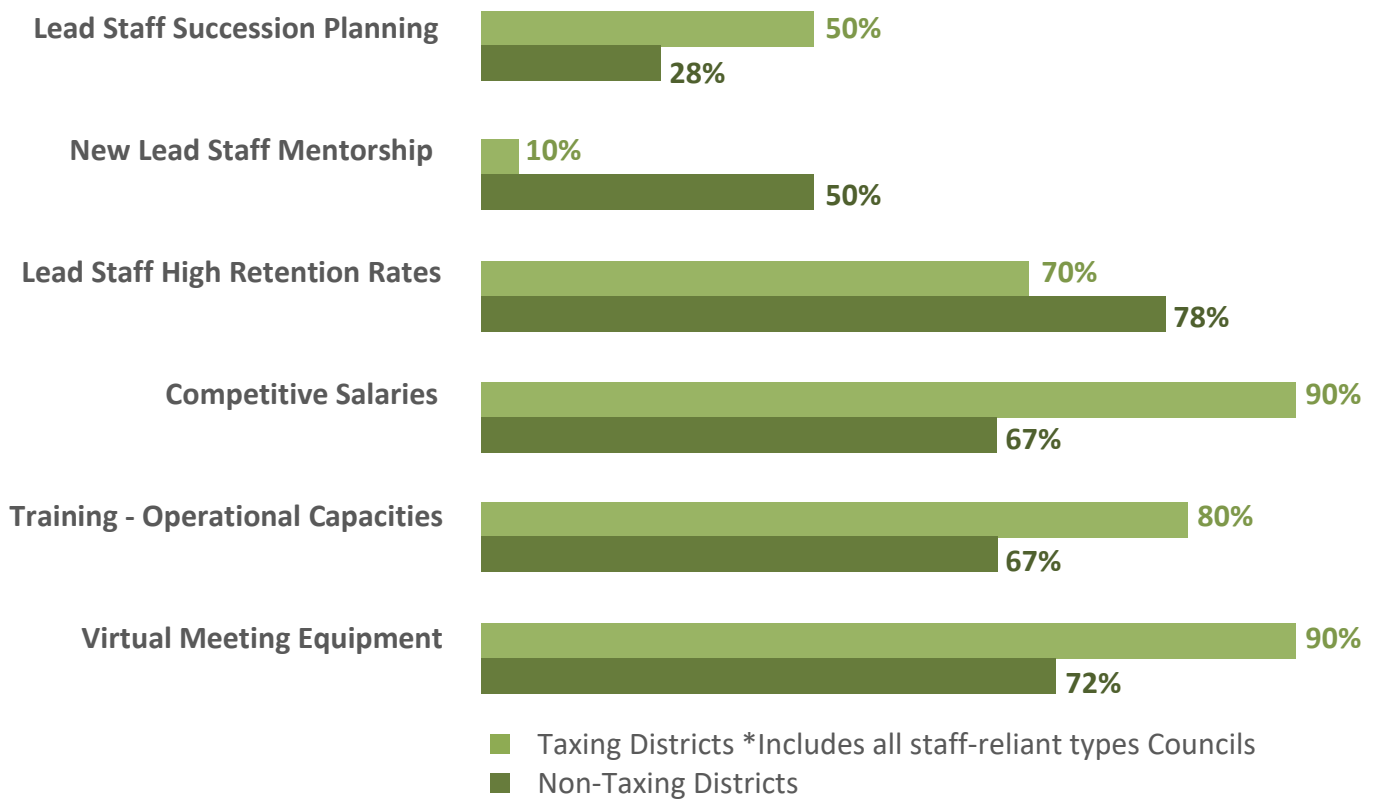
- Among all district respondents, there was a moderate level of board training and initiative.
- Although not significantly different from each other, many respondents indicated a lack of board and staff succession planning and new district manager mentorship.
- For salary competitiveness, there were significant differences in responses between staff-reliant districts and their board- and partner-reliant counterparts.

Figure 11. Differences in Organizational Capacity between Board, Staff, and Partner- Reliant Districts.



Additionally, we analyzed for differences between districts that have a local tax base and those that do not (**Figure 12**). Taxing districts, which were all categorized as staff-reliant based on the typology method, were more likely to have competitive salaries and benefits, have access to adequate equipment and technology for virtual meetings, and staff training on key operational capacities (e.g., project management, contracting, and administrative tasks). These results were not unexpected since having access to unrestricted funds likely provides organizations with opportunities to improve their operations. Interestingly, non-taxing districts, which did not include any staff-reliant types, were slightly more likely to have higher lead staff retention rates. This seemed surprising, given that taxing districts have more competitive salaries and provide more training opportunities on key operational practices. However, other factors may affect this result. For example, 60% of taxing districts, which included all staff-reliant types, responded that board members had clear positions describing their roles and responsibilities, compared to 89% for non-taxing districts. Having clear position descriptions can support understanding of roles, which can have a significant impact on organizational management and relationships between board and staff.

Figure 12. Differences in Organizational Capacity between Taxing and Non-Taxing Districts.



Working with Other Local Partners

We asked how often organizations worked with other councils, districts, and/or other local partners. Respondents could choose from "most of the time" to "never" on a 4-point Likert scale. We discuss findings for councils and districts as well as across capacity typologies. When we looked at capacity typologies, we compared councils to councils and districts to districts. We also compared the differences between districts that have received local taxes with those that have not.

Comparing Councils and Districts

92% of districts and 75% of councils indicated that they worked with councils, districts, and other local partners most of the time. We found that districts shared more resources with other local partners compared to councils. For districts, 58% shared office and other administrative costs with local partners most of the time. Additionally, 74% stated they shared staff expertise with local partners most of the time. This included technical skills, GIS, and outreach to landowners or farmers. By comparison, 68% of councils responded that they seldom or never shared office space and other administrative costs with local partners. Additionally, 45% of councils said they shared staff expertise most of the time and 49% said some of the time. However, it is important to keep in mind that many districts have a history of sharing office space with NRCS, which likely extended to sharing resources with this agency as well, and may have affected these results.

Comparing Capacity Typologies and Taxing Districts v. Non-Taxing Districts

We noted that the only statistically significant finding for districts was that there was less sharing of office space among board-reliant districts compared to staff-reliant districts, which is not surprising given that many board-reliant districts have few staff. The majority of staff-reliant types (96% for districts and 85% for councils) reported that they worked with councils, other districts, or local partners most of the time. For both board- and partner-

reliant districts, 80% indicated the same; while for councils, partner types responded similarly at 67% and board types at 56%. Staff-reliant organizations likely have more capacity to work with partners compared to board- and partner-reliant types. 67% of partner-reliant councils shared staff expertise between councils, districts, and other local partners most of the time, compared to staff- (52%) and board-reliant (31%) council types. All partner-reliant councils (100%) also shared office space and other administrative costs with councils, districts, and other local partners most of the time compared to staff- (19%) and board-reliant (13%) types. This was likely a product of their organizational structure, which may have also influenced how they worked with other partners in a geographic area to have more emphasis on sharing expertise. There were no major distinctions between taxing and non-taxing districts.

Leveraging Operating Capacity Grants

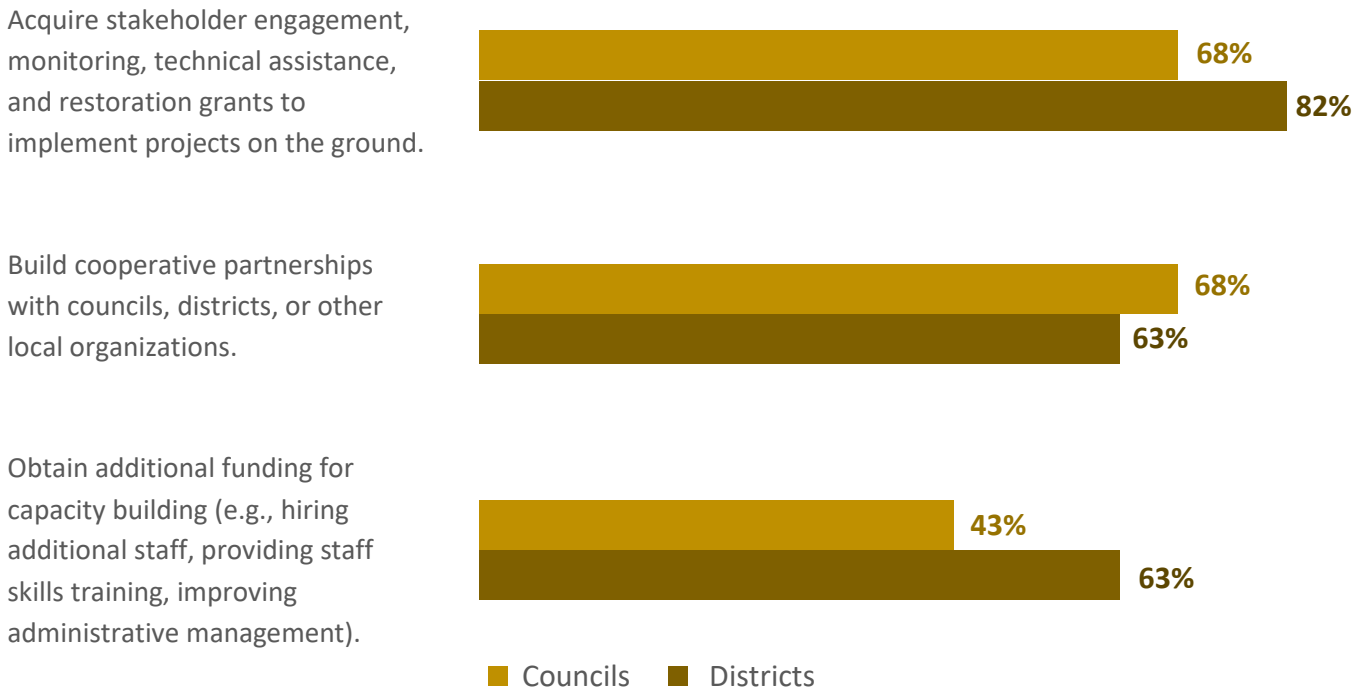
We also asked how often councils and districts looked for opportunities to leverage Operating Capacity grants to sustain and grow organizational capacity, build partnerships, and obtain additional funding. We asked them to rate how often they worked with other local groups. Respondents could choose from "most of the time" to "never" on a 4-point Likert scale. Below, we discuss findings for councils and districts as well as across capacity typologies. When we looked at capacity typologies, we compared councils to councils and districts to districts. We also compared the differences between districts that have received local taxes with those that have not.

Comparing Councils and Districts

Most councils and districts reported seeking opportunities to leverage additional funding (**Figure 13**). More districts than councils obtained additional funding for capacity building to hire additional staff, provide training, and improve administrative management compared to councils. This may be tied to higher retention rates for lead staff and having more competitive salaries. This may create greater stability for an organization through the preservation of institutional knowledge and support an organization in working towards ongoing improvements. Additionally, more districts than councils also used District Capacity grants to acquire grants for stakeholder engagement, monitoring, technical assistance, and restoration for projects compared to councils. This was likely because of how District Capacity grants have been structured compared to those for councils. As described earlier, District Capacity funds have a greater emphasis on the implementation of the Agricultural Water Quality Management Program, with 75% of funds designated for this.

Some additional open-ended comments on the survey provided further insight into what has helped keep organizations healthy and functional to address challenges in sustaining operating capacity. To maintain organizational financial management, most described diversifying funding revenues beyond OWEB and identified a need for unrestricted funds, not tied to project grants, to support critical operations. Some specific examples of funding diversification included: participation in programs (e.g., OWEB's FIP and BPA's Fish & Wildlife), maintaining strong partnerships with other organizations and entities focusing on conservation, (e.g., local counties, councils, districts, and Tribes), and development of an annual federally negotiated indirect cost rate agreement. Lastly, some respondents mentioned learning to budget for more project management time in their grant applications, which built in additional operational capacity for projects.

Figure 13. Leveraging Operating Capacity Grants.*



* These results included respondents who indicated “most of the time” to each of the statements.

Comparing Capacity Typologies and Taxing Districts v. Non-Taxing Districts

Partner-reliant councils (100%) responded that most of the time they looked for opportunities to leverage Council Capacity grants to acquire stakeholder engagement, monitoring, technical assistance, and restoration grants to implement projects on the ground. Staff-(67%) and board-reliant (63%) councils did not seek these out as much as partner-reliant types, but a majority did. However, staff- (70%) and board-reliant (69%) councils sought out Council Capacity grants to build cooperative partnerships with councils, districts, and other local organizations, in comparison to partner-reliant types (33%). Partner-reliant councils engaged less often in building cooperative relationships and seeking stakeholder engagement—likely due to the built-in collaboration with their district partner. This was statistically significant. There were no major differences between districts based on capacity typology or whether they received local taxes.



Youth volunteers at Riley Creek. credit: Curry SWCD.

V. Case Study Findings

Case studies provide detailed understanding of how organizations operate within their contexts, and what facilitates and impedes capacity. We selected seven case study organizations across Oregon with different staff sizes across typologies, in rural and urban contexts, and with varying levels of resources obtained and leveraged, which increases the applicability of findings for organizations across the state. However, we recognize that councils and districts have a diversity of experiences and contexts within which they function. To address this, we used the survey findings, which had an 85% response rate across all councils and districts that have received Operating Capacity grants, to develop a sense of the typical issues that organizations have faced. We also used the 20 in-depth organizational profiles to identify common themes across the capacity dimensions. Lastly, we included input from the breadth of experiences of the Core Project Committee. Together, these approaches informed our case study design and bolstered the findings to be more generalizable across organizations. We also kept in mind that we needed to create a process that could be reasonably achieved within the project timeline, since examining all organizations in Oregon through an interview process would not be possible. For a list of case study organizations, see [Appendix 4](#).

In the following paragraphs, we review the findings from our analysis of case study organizations.

- Section A considers the impacts and uses of Operating Capacity grants.
- Section B looks at common governance challenges and strategies to address these.
- Section C addresses partnership development, challenges and strategies, and models used.
- Section D focuses on funding strategies and challenges.

V.A. How Were Operating Capacity Grants Used?

All interviewees acknowledged the essential need for the Operating Capacity grant program for councils and districts. Many said that councils and districts across the state would no longer exist if they did not receive Operating Capacity grants. A few indicated they could manage without it, if they had access to other funding sources (e.g., taxing districts, local foundations, local government budgets, endangered species, and BPA funds). However, they said they would function at a much lower level and would not be able to complete most of the restoration and conservation work they were currently doing. Additionally, it is important to recognize that project development can be a multi-year process depending on the complexity of the project and number of partners involved. Because of this, many interviewees pointed to Operating Capacity grants as vital to continue project development, which brought additional funding to the organization. Some interviewees noted the positive impact that Operating Capacity funds had on their community's local economy and how their organization's presence supported other local conservation partners. Additionally, all interviewees pointed to the fundamental need for the Operating Capacity grant program due to changing funding priorities from other agencies, the lack of consistency in external funders' grant deadlines, and a general lack of programmatic capacity funding elsewhere. All highlighted their appreciation for the provision of the Operating Capacity program and how the program's reliability has served as an essential strategy for supporting councils and districts' operations, which has supported state agencies in meeting state-wide restoration and conservation goals.

Councils

Case study councils primarily used their Council Capacity grants as follows (order based on frequency reported):

- (1) Project development through relationship/partnership building** through paid staff time to participate in local committees, boards, and foundations; event attendance to build an organizational reputation in the community; and meeting with landowners. Through these avenues, staff have developed joint priorities and project concepts with these partners, and acquired funds. Other than Council Capacity grants, most grants have been tied to project work itself, aside from allowable indirect, and there has been a lack of programmatic capacity grant support.
- (2) Initial funds for cash match for restoration and conservation projects** which helped bring in additional project funding. OWEB grants were particularly useful for federal grant match because federal grants cannot be matched with other federal grants. This has also supported use of federal dollars for restoration and conservation work, since federal agencies have often faced challenges in spending all of their allocated dollars on implementation. Councils have also used other OWEB grants for cash match.
- (3) Board member recruitment** through paid staff time for participating in local boards and committees, as well as attending community events to develop relationships with potential new board members for current or future board vacancies.
- (4) Ad-hoc regional groups as a collaborative approach** to meet the needs of local partners, including training, information sharing, and resource sharing.
- (5) Staff and board training** for professional development and networking opportunities through conferences (e.g., CONNECT), technical skills-building courses, and workshops.
- (6) Operational support** for rent, utilities, administrative staff time, etc.
- (7) Staff time on revising and updating operational policies and procedures, strategic plans, and annual work plans.**

Overall, councils appreciated the current flexibility of the Council Capacity funds and how OWEB's changes over time have made it easier to use the funds in an unrestricted manner. Many appreciated that OWEB removed the match component to obtain the Council Capacity grant and has allowed councils to use the funds as they best deem fit. Any expense eligible in other OWEB grants has been considered an eligible expense for Council Capacity grants. **Many interviewees stated that Council Capacity grants were not able to fund community outreach and education activities due to statute,¹⁴** but were interested in funding for this. As one interviewee said, "Communications, outreach, and education funding are small pots of funding, so you have to write numerous applications just to get one project funded. Additionally, these types of grants are typically offered annually or bi-annually, so the amount of work adds up quickly."

Additional needs that interviewees expressed included:

- **The ability to use Council Capacity funding for the purchase of vehicles,** which has not been allowed by statute, e.g., ATVs or trucks for site visits, particularly in rural areas.
- **More guidance from OWEB on how to write a successful grant and adhere to reporting requirements.** Some commented that OWEB grants have a steep learning curve, which has been particularly challenging to navigate with lead staff turnover. Some commented on the administrative burden of reporting requirements, but understood the need for state agencies to ensure accountability and effective use of public funds. One interviewee mentioned that it could be helpful to have OWEB new grantee training sessions scheduled periodically throughout the year, instead of once a year. Considering staff transitions and the need for repetition when learning new information, some stated that an OWEB-hosted workshop would be useful.
- **Ways to make funding more equitable for geographic areas that have fewer funding opportunities** (e.g., agency regional funding priorities, lack of endangered or threatened species, fewer available local organizations to partner with on projects, less local foundations). However, they recognized the challenges OWEB has faced in balancing fairness with managing a statewide grant program.
- **A regional forum to learn from other councils or districts.** Suggestions included a show and tell with an OWEB Regional Program Representative that could help organize groups by region. Interestingly, this mimicked what some groups have done already, e.g., the Upper Willamette Stewardship Network or the John Day Basin Partnership. A regional forum could be useful for geographic areas that have faced challenges in working with local partners and developing joint priorities.

Districts

Case study districts primarily used their District Capacity grants as follows (order based on frequency):

- (1) **Project development through relationship/partnership building** through paid staff time to participate in local committees, boards, and foundations; event attendance to build an organizational reputation in the community; and landowner meetings. Through these avenues, staff have developed joint priorities and project concepts with these partners, and acquired funds. Other than District Capacity grants, most

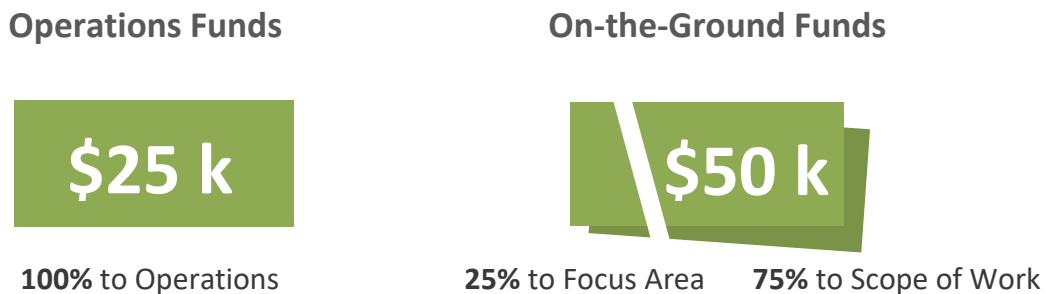
¹⁴ Refer to Measure 76 and ORS 541.956, which authorize OWEB to make grants available for outreach activities that are necessary for carrying out eligible restoration and acquisition projects that protect or restore native fish or wildlife habitat, or that protect or restore natural watershed or ecosystem functions to improve water quality or stream flows. To qualify as necessary for restoration or acquisition, the project must be tied to a specific geography, address clearly articulated habitat or watershed or ecosystem function goals for that geography, and identify a clear path toward achieving the restoration or acquisition measurable outcomes within a reasonable and specific timeframe. Projects with a primary purpose of education are not eligible.

grants have historically been tied to project work itself, aside from allowable indirect, and there has been a lack of programmatic capacity grant support.

- (2) **Operational support** for rent, utilities, administrative staff time, etc.
- (3) **Ad-hoc regional groups as a collaborative approach** to meet the needs of local partners, including training, information sharing, and resource sharing.
- (4) **Staff and board training** for professional development and networking opportunities through conferences (e.g., CONNECT, OACD), technical skills-building courses, and workshops. Networking has allowed them to see how other districts operate, what structures others have used, and what staff positions they have and the roles/responsibilities associated with them.

Compared to Council Capacity grants, District Capacity funds have been more limited in their use (**Figure 14**). Many interviewees mentioned an **interest in increased flexibility in spending District Capacity funds so that more funding could be spent on staffing and capacity building, rather than for restoration and conservation projects**. As one interviewee said, “If we invested more in staffing, we would get more conservation on the ground. We need to have the capacity to be able to apply for the grants, and right now, that’s lacking.” Additionally, a district discussed how the tax base funded its own grant program and supported operational costs, while the District Capacity grants paid for grant program administration.

Figure 14. Breakdown of District Capacity Grants.



V.B. What Governance Challenges Have Organizations Faced?

Individuals play an important role in maintaining an organization’s longevity while engaging in strategic watershed restoration and conservation planning. Councils and districts are typically small organizations facing large-scale issues and needs, and as such, the individuals on the staff and the board need to use their skill sets, backgrounds, and perspectives for the organization to achieve its goals. Through our case studies, we found that the top common governance challenges and opportunities were:

- (1) **Lead staff capacity and turnover.** This includes the key role lead staff play and the necessary skills they use to manage the organization, how they support development of an effectively engaged board, and what happens during times of lead staff transition.
- (2) **Board recruitment.** This encompasses common challenges in recruitment, as well as essential board member skills. Skills of particular importance included organizational direction setting, reviewing and updating governing policies and procedures, fiscal oversight and management, and providing guidance to lead staff.
- (3) **Strategic planning.** This pertains to the significance of the process of creating plans, as well as the level of detail needed to beneficially guide an organization's priority-setting.

How Has Lead Staff Capacity and Turnover Affected Organizations?

Lead staff have played an important role in an organization's stability and overall trajectory. This position has a high learning curve and has required someone who is either competent or quickly able to become competent in multiple skill sets. Lead staff that performed particularly well in this role tended to have years of experience working in a natural resource-focused agency or were strategic in building partnerships and successfully identified how to learn the information they needed. Skills needed for lead staff include leadership, relationship building, personnel management, fiscal management, grant writing, and conservation knowledge (**Table 3**). Additionally, some interviewees described the significance of lead staff's development of board relationships in providing guidance, education, and training to support each in their respective roles, so they could mutually guide the organization's trajectory. This will be discussed in more detail in the section about strategies used by case study organizations. Specific to councils, we noted that as an organization grows, the lead staff role evolves from a Watershed Coordinator to an Executive Director. The change in the skills of this position has also been affected by how OWEB has modified its granting criteria over time to support organizational structure (See [Appendix 1](#)).

Table 3. Key Lead Staff Roles.

Lead Staff Skills Needed	Components
Leadership/Strategist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a vision for the organization and the watershed that identifies how partners and funders fit into this. • Effective project management skills and project schedule management. • Incorporation of content training and educational talks by agency experts into board meetings to help board make informed decisions on project and funding priorities. • Engagement in creative problem solving, extended work hours, and driven by concern for land and people.
Relationship Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication skills with partners and providing updates. • Actively and visibly engaged in the community to discover joint priorities to acquire funds for project development through participation in local committees and boards, event attendance, and meetings with landowners. • Identification of key contacts and development of a community network to obtain multiple perspectives on how to develop and implement projects.
Personnel Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to make challenging HR decisions, (e.g., need to lay off staff for fiscal reasons, management and firing of staff for substandard performance, and recognition of need for a different staff skill set as organizational and funding priorities shift). • <i>This was especially challenging in smaller communities and smaller organizations that have built up relationships among staff and/or board members.</i>
Fiscal Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General knowledge of funding sources, ensuring consistent revenue streams, and development of a plan to diversify funding streams. • <i>Someone also needed to know financial budgeting, which could be the lead staff or the fiscal manager.</i>
Grant Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to write a grant proposal that told a story, while integrating the priorities of the organization and potential funder. • Grant cycles from external funders have varied, which created a sense of pressure with constant deadlines.
Conservation Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Without a conservation background, it was challenging to lead an organization in strategic planning for the watershed.

Impacts of Lead Staff Turnover

From the case study interviews, we found that the top issue that councils and districts faced with their lead staff was turnover of these positions. It has been challenging for organizations to find their footing when an executive director or district manager has left. Sometimes, this caused an organization to experience a downward cycle from the challenges of finding a qualified and capable candidate, particularly in more remote, rural areas. The most common reason lead staff left stemmed from the large workload for the position, which led to burn-out. Interviewees were often concerned that the highly skilled, multi-talented, motivated individuals would not last in the position for more than a few years, and would use the skills they learned to move on to a job with more stable funding, higher pay, and access to benefits. As one interviewee said, “If you get someone who’s a high performer, they’re going to leave because they’re going to try and leverage something with better opportunities.” The rising costs of living and housing in Oregon have further affected these decisions. Interviewees, including lead staff themselves, described how individuals who chose to remain in the position for a longer time, often stayed because they were from the area or had become a part of the community and integrated the job into their lifestyle.

Lead staff turnover was sometimes precipitated by a lack of sufficient board engagement. In these situations, the board was less involved with providing organizational direction through strategic plans and offered less accountability of lead staff’s work plans. They were also less engaged in effective fiscal oversight and less aware of how to maintain consistent funding revenue. In these contexts, the board was more focused on project implementation than organizational management. Another reason lead staff left has been tied to board micromanagement, which can lead to organizational gridlock. Board chairs have tended to work more closely with lead staff and have often set the standard for the board’s level of engagement with organizational direction-setting, which has impacts on an organization’s trajectory. Additionally, lead staff shaped the relationship with the board in establishing expectations, roles, and responsibilities. Micromanagement often stemmed from a lack of priority setting and unclear board roles and responsibilities. Essential board skills and their impacts on case study organizations’ capacity are described in more detail in the “Board Recruitment” section.

When lead staff left, it was often a challenge for board members to manage the organization, given the unpaid nature of board positions and the limited time these positions have been able to commit. When an organization had additional staff, they relied on their most experienced staff to fill in as interim. If they lacked additional staff, boards sometimes contacted past lead staff to act as interim or provide essential services (e.g., fiscal management, grant reporting requirements, contractor payments, and managing partner relationships for projects). Staffing transitions were particularly difficult when organizations lacked priority setting. It was challenging to properly maintain budgets, which led to missed contractor payments and project derailment, as well as missed grant reporting deadlines, and a decline in incoming grants, which significantly reduced partner trust.

Because of these struggles, the board was less strategic in hiring replacement lead staff. Although, it is important to keep in mind that many interviewees spoke to inherent hiring challenges from a lack of qualified local applicants and difficulty attracting external applicants because of competitive wages and location. Some organizations that hired from outside the community, and even the state, have dealt with additional issues of people not remaining in these positions for long, even with an actively engaged board. Due to these concerns, some interviewees spoke of difficulty establishing trust with board and staff to effectively support lead staff. It also took time to build trust with partners for project development. These realities have unintentionally raised the bar for lead staff hires to engage in substantial relationship-building and challenging work. When an organization hired lead staff locally, who was new to this level of responsibility and type of work, disengaged boards provided minimal training and guidance, while lead staff tried to get the organization afloat and manage

on-going projects and partner relationships. In both of these situations, lead staff either (1) quickly left, resulting in multiple turnovers, (2) took on the challenge of managing the organization because of personal drive and interest, or (3) remained in the position, but were not able to effectively manage the organization.

Impacts of Organizational Stagnation and Finding Qualified Staff

While many organizations faced challenges with lead staff turnover, others faced difficulties with stagnation, wherein, lead staff lacked the necessary capacity, skills, or training to lead organizations at a particular point in time. From the case study interviews, we learned that board members in these situations: (1) waited too long to fire the individual and were unsure of how to address lead staff personnel issues, (2) were not actively engaged in managing the organization, so they were unable to recognize what lead staff skills were needed, or (3) were concerned they would not find a replacement. Some interviewees indicated challenges with finding qualified candidates were also connected to the grant-funded nature of the positions, salary level, and need for benefits, coupled with challenges of hiring in rural areas, which have also faced rising housing costs and increased costs associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Some interviewees indicated that effects from organizational stagnation made partners less likely to work with them, which led to missed opportunities for project work and funding.

Specific to districts, a key informant interview discussed how district managers sometimes delayed retirement out of concerns of not finding a qualified replacement after working at the organization for many years. Additionally, case study interviewees for councils and districts stated how there were often limited opportunities for entry-level technicians to become program managers since organizations were typically small. This could lead to a catch-22, wherein there was reduced opportunity for other staff to move up the ladder to take on new responsibilities or needed to wait until someone was ready to retire. This created inherent challenges for some organizations to hire younger staff, who wanted to grow their careers, skills, and income levels. Depending on the level of board engagement, these situations sometimes precipitated a downward cycle when lead staff retired and the board faced difficulties finding a replacement.

What strategies have been used to address these issues?

- 1 Development of an effectively engaged board.
- 2 Creation of succession plan.
- 3 Establishment of regional networks.

Effectively engaged boards were better able to manage lead staff turnover, often supporting operations and interim staff through the transition. Staff had relevant conservation experience and established partner relationships. Board meetings continued to run smoothly, fiscal budget and grant reporting were maintained, projects continued, and contractors received payments. Sometimes board members served on a neighboring council, district, or other local partners' boards, which supported them in finding replacement staff, as well as providing training and support for interim staff. Board members were also connected with the community and partners, who supported their efforts in finding a new lead staff through their community networks. Replacement staff received training and the organization's reputation with partners and funders was maintained.

Approaches used by lead staff to develop an effectively engaged board included:

- Incorporation of 15-minute educational content and skills training into board meetings to help boards understand their roles and responsibilities (e.g., personnel and fiscal management).
- Inclusion of agency partners and experts to board meetings for project updates and upcoming funding opportunities to help boards understand regional priorities to make informed decisions.
- Development of strategic plans to co-establish organizational and watershed priorities.
- Proactive recruitment of board members. (Refer to the "[Board Recruitment](#)" section on page 27 for details.)
- Annual retreats for board members and lead staff to discuss accomplishments and priorities.

Some organizations developed a succession plan by training someone within the organization to replace lead staff within the next few years. Typically, this person was the project manager or technician. However, since organizations have typically been small, this has been challenging to implement since a new staff person was needed to fill their role as well. Some interviewees stated that they created an online shared drive of important organizational and project documents for future lead staff to reference. This included a list of daily and annual tasks, a spreadsheet of funding sources, organizational bylaws, policies and procedures, and strategic plans.

In rural and urban settings, some organizations had established regional networks, which provided additional support for lead staff transitions. For example, a group of regional councils and districts formed the Upper Willamette Stewardship Network (UWSN) through the relationships they built over time. UWSN has a “Core Team” consisting of lead staff from each of the organizations, “Project Teams” consisting of other staff positions, and a Network Coordinator that focuses on the partnership’s needs. The “Core Team” helps align organizational priorities and leverage grant opportunities, while “Project Teams” focus on various restoration/conservation topics or skills training that are based on the needs of the members involved. The UWSN has bylaws and a MOU, and the varying “Project Teams” have differing degrees of formal guiding documents based on the needs of those in the group. By creating this partnership, interviewees noted that staff transitions have been easier for organizations and, particularly, for new lead staff. This has created an easy landing for connecting with other lead staff to learn from their experiences, increased transparency of how other organizations have operated and managed finances, and supported the development of a community network of relationships with partners and colleagues. This has helped develop a culture that leverages the knowledge and expertise of the group for mentorship, rather than relying solely on past lead staff or the board chair. Furthermore, both the “Core Team” and “Project Teams” meet regularly, which has made space to obtain advice and insight for handling a variety of issues without the conversation being tied to job performance.

Another example of a regional network came from the John Day Basin Partnership (JDBP), which was generated from the relationships developed over time and more recently supported by an OWEB FIP grant. The JDBP has a partnership coordinator who hosts regional quarterly meetings to coordinate projects, bring in agency partners to discuss funding priorities, share completed projects to celebrate successes and learn from each other’s experiences, and support skills development. Skills training included a GIS consultant demonstration for how to use an online ArcGIS database for quickly noting prioritized streams to inform project development and coordination. Another example included hands-on training for a rapid survey tool developed by monitoring coordinators to assess beaver habitats. These meetings have supported a network of conservation partners that can assist lead staff transitions through these overlapping points of connection and peer learning.

How does Board Recruitment Affect Organizational Capacity?

Boards have a large impact on organizations' trajectories through the composition of their members, the functions they serve, their level of engagement in organizational direction setting and watershed visioning, and most importantly, the relationships they develop with lead staff (**Table 4**). Through the case study interviews, we learned that common challenges with board guidance typically entailed:

- (1) Micromanagement** of lead staff, which led to organizational gridlock and departure of lead staff.
- (2) Lack of sufficient engagement** in establishing organizational priorities and accountability of work plans, which often led to lead staff burn-out.
- (3) Board homogeneity**, which sometimes led to a lack of sufficient perspectives for brainstorming and making complex land management decisions.

However, it is important to note that some interviewees in rural areas stated that their boards may have appeared “homogeneous” but had key community members with diverse skill sets from holding multiple community roles (e.g., rancher and business owner) and serving on more than one local board. Additionally, some interviewees discussed issues with boards that were mainly comprised of members with a background primarily as landowners versus members who served as landowners, but had an agency staff background. Landowner-dominant boards sometimes had issues related to a lack of understanding of agency processes or familiarity with strategic planning, although they had community trust. Agency-dominant boards sometimes lacked community trust and were viewed as enforcers based on how they served in past roles and lacked the ability to effectively overcome this perception.

Table 4. *How Boards Affected Case Study Organizations’ Capacity.*

Board Leadership	How it Contributed to Case Study Organizations’ Capacity
Diverse Skill Set	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead staff were able to engage with any of the Board members for guidance and brainstorm with their expertise and knowledge. • When there were too many people with the same knowledge and skills, there was less feedback since individuals tended to think and view problems similarly, which can cause an organization to become stuck. • Note: In more rural and remote areas, board members noted they have a diverse skill set in terms of holding multiple roles in a given community, e.g., rancher and business owner.
Strategic Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided organizational guidance and direction, which limited micromanagement. • When a strategic plan or annual work plan lacked specificity, some boards micro-managed staff since organizational priorities were unclear.
Organizational Policies and Procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular updates to these created accountability, supported communication, and helped boards avoid getting stuck in the day-to-day operations. • Helped organizations to remain compliant with updates in legal requirements.
Fiscal Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of fiscal oversight, e.g., knowledge of fiscal terms, ability to read a financial report and budget, and recognition of red flags. • Identification of differences between types of funders (e.g., federal agencies, private foundations, OWEB, ODA) to understand how each distributed funds since this affected how organizations managed their operations, projects, and ability to balance budgets. • Needed training/guidance on this.
Personnel Management of Lead Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accountability of lead staff in performing duties and guidance on work plan and strategic plan. • Supported lead staff decision-making without micromanaging, (i.e., Board not overly involved in the details of running the organization). • Needed training/guidance on this.

Furthermore, we learned that the biggest challenges organizations faced with boards were tied to recruitment challenges. Interviewees discussed how these were difficult to overcome since they have been a product of board requirements established by OWEB and ODA or reflected community perspectives. Common recruitment challenges councils and districts faced are described below.

Diversity - Since board positions have been unpaid, interviewees often spoke to challenges with recruiting younger participants, as well as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) residents, due to time and financial constraints. Specific to districts, they faced additional challenges based on requirements of land ownership for election eligibility, which often meant that only typically older, white men were qualified candidates.

Grant Management - Many interviewees described difficulties of finding board members that understood fiscal management principles. Although agency staff were more likely to have experience with managing budgets and projects, they lacked experience with grant management and navigating fluctuations in funding. Landowners who had experiences with business principles and ownership also lacked experience with grants and nonprofit management.

Varying Commitment - Interviewees indicated that retirees tended to remain on the board longer because they had more time, but were sometimes less engaged based on the voluntary nature of board positions. In contrast, landowners with a background as agency staff were paid, in a sense, by their agency for their time on the board, which some interviewees felt made them more dedicated, even if they had less time to engage. Landowners were typically involved if they were large landowners and/or had completed numerous restoration and conservation projects with the organization.

Challenges in Smaller Communities - Interviewees from rural communities often discussed that they had a smaller pool of potential members to draw from, who were often unable to take on additional commitments. For districts, it is not uncommon to have the bare minimum number of board positions filled to have quorum. Some interviewees described difficulties when one to two members were unable to attend a meeting, it prevented the district from conducting business and making decisions due to a lack of quorum.

Community Trust in Organization - Some spoke about issues of communities not wanting state agencies to regulate lands and practices, as well as negative past experiences with agency representatives. Interviewees sometimes discussed challenges related to lack of community awareness of conservation issues.

Level of Responsibility - Some interviewees mentioned that being a board member carried too many responsibilities and risks as an unpaid, volunteer position. Risks included: legal implications and ethics violations, mandatory reporting for abuse, and fiscal liability.

District Specific - Some interviewees described challenges with absentee landowners, in Eastern Oregon, who were frequent project partners, but have not been eligible to run for board positions, since their primary residence was outside of the community.

How have councils and districts navigated board recruitment challenges?

We learned that board diversity was important not only for skills and experiences, but also because of how this influenced organizational management. When board positions were posted or spread by word of mouth alone, organizations typically had a less diverse board. Some interviewees described how they **proactively shaped their organizations through targeted recruitment**. These are broken down by councils and districts.

Council recruitment strategies included:

Completed a needs assessment. Councils used board demographic and skills surveys to ensure a diversity of knowledges and experiences to address organizational and land use needs. Interviewees commonly mentioned looking for candidates with nonprofit management and financial knowledge, familiarity with restoration/conservation projects, and technical skills from a variety of work experiences (e.g., lawyer, environmental, livestock, and agriculture). Additionally, they recognized agency staff's familiarity with government processes, partnerships, and funding sources; while landowners had more familiarity with ranching and farming practices.

Targeted recruitment to find board members who could help them meet goals in their strategic plans and strengthen communication and information sharing across different sectors. For example, an interviewee described how they pursued a transportation department representative for their council so they could conduct a road mile inventory using the department's GIS data. This aided project and funding development, which also supported the local county. Another interviewee shared how they sought an industry representative to gain property access for projects and obtain private industry monies to leverage larger, federal grants.

Attended and hosted community events with agency partners to form a community network with the intention to identify potential board members and encourage their involvement in projects to cultivate a pool of potential candidates. Interviewees indicated that by consistently showing up and demonstrating that they were able to help troubleshoot problems and find funding to implement projects, they were able to build a positive organizational reputation and educate the public on their role. This encouraged community members to join the board because of the help they received.

District recruitment strategies included:

Recruited non-landowners or those who own or manage less than 10 acres of land to become at-large or associate directors with the intention to become zone directors. To address issues of diversity or lack of expertise in the board, some districts have engaged individuals who do not meet the zone director eligibility criteria to become at-large or associate directors, since these positions do not have the same legal requirements. It is important to note that the associate director position has no vote when the board makes an official decision, but can augment the knowledge of board members. After 1-year, these positions were eligible to become a zone director if they were also a registered voter who lived within the zone they represented, and had a conservation plan approved by the district.¹⁵

Encouraged frequent project partners to apply to become board members as long as they meet the election eligibility criteria for directorship. Interviewees stated that landowners were often interested in giving back and supporting the economic vitality of the community.

How Have Strategic Plans Affected Organizational Capacity?

From the case study interviews, we learned that strategic planning processes varied based on the organization's structure, management style, and the regional contexts within which they worked. Because of these realities, strategic plans served different functions. Some organizations engaged in a more detailed approach, while others needed a broader plan. In this section, strategic plans refer to an individual organization's strategic plan, rather than strategic action plans used to coordinate landscape-scale restoration and conservation across multiple organizations as part of an OWEB-FIP, P-TA, NRCS RCPP grant, or others.

¹⁵ ORS 568.560(2) and (3) describe the full eligibility requirements to become a conservation district director.

- **Detailed strategic plans** included a variety of perspectives and needs, and incorporated relevant technical expertise, to identify geographic project and/or programmatic priorities that could result in tangible benefits or improvements with clearly measurable objectives, and designation of short, medium, and long-term priorities. Lastly, they identified potential partnerships and funding sources. *These organizations typically had more available regional funding opportunities.*
- **Broader strategic plans** focused on organizational history, land uses, and limiting factors (e.g., biological, physical, or chemical conditions that limit a species viability in a habitat). The strategic plan then functioned as a litmus test to see if emergent funding opportunities were aligned with the goals and needs described in the strategic plan. This allowed them to be better positioned for those funding sources. To guide day-to-day work, lead staff developed a detailed annual work plan from the strategic plan to help establish geographic project and/or programmatic priorities between staff and the board, along with potential partners and funders. *These organizations often had more limited regional funding opportunities.*

Strategic plans and annual work plans, together, supported organizational efficiencies and established expectations between board and lead staff through joint priority setting. By creating specific objectives and measures to reach the vision of their plans, lead staff and boards:

- Identified short, medium, and long-term project priorities to better sequence project timing.
- Developed a shared understanding of what amount and type of project work was manageable based on staffing capacity, which helped establish reasonable workload expectations.
- Developed a shared understanding of organizational priorities, which enabled lead staff and boards to function effectively in their respective roles.
- Guided lead staff’s annual work plans and day-to-day tasks.
- Streamlined pursuit of key partnerships and funding sources for projects.
- Designed stronger grant proposals.

Over time, this created an upward organizational trajectory by supporting their ability to obtain larger grants by attracting partnerships and external funding sources (**Figure 15**). The successful execution of a plan was led by lead staff who were able to “carry the vision,” engage in relationship building, and create opportunities for “small wins” early on that demonstrated commitment, which built trust with partners. Furthermore, achieving “small wins” cemented partners’ faith that the organization could reliably accomplish the work, so partners were willing to put in more time and energy. This was the case regardless of whether the organization had greater access to funding opportunities or not, though, of course having more funding opportunities in a geographic area was helpful.

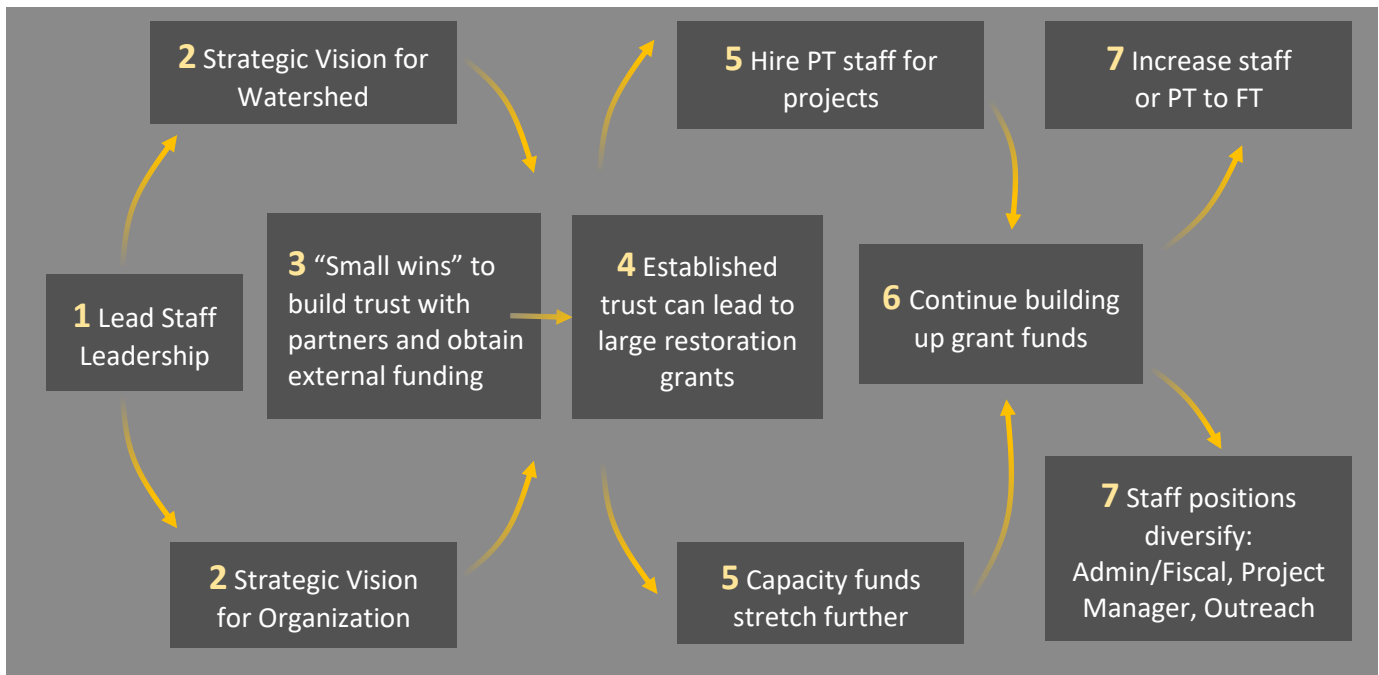
As more funding became available, some interviewees described how they were able to hire additional staff to work on projects and stretch the capacity grants further. Lead staff continued to build up the organization’s grant application portfolio and diversified funding streams to keep funding coming in the door to increase existing staff’s FTE from part-time to full-time or hire additional project staff. Over time, this allowed them to diversify key organizational staffing positions in-house as well (e.g., project manager, fiscal manager/ administrator, outreach coordinator). This allowed lead staff to delegate some of their responsibilities and expanded the organizations’ capacity to gain partnerships, obtain grants, and develop projects. In watersheds with varied land uses, some interviewees also mentioned how they diversified the types of restoration and conservation projects they pursued to engage additional partners and develop more funding opportunities. Some interviewees were able to tie smaller restoration and conservation projects into landscape-scale projects, leveraging the partnerships they built, by pursuing OWEB FIP, P-TA, and NRCS RCPP grants.



As one interviewee said, *“If you don't fundamentally understand how the landscape's working, in terms of watershed processes, land use, and the owner's objectives, you're not going to get it right and you're not going to have them helping you on the project. You really have to understand the physical processes behind the landscape, so you can understand how to implement something that is going to work, both for watershed benefits, whether it's fish, water quality, whatever it may be, but also, with the use of that land for some other purpose, which is not always obvious and apparent.”*



Figure 15. Organizational Upward Trajectory.



What Happened Without a Detailed Strategic Plan?

Strategic plans and/or annual work plans that lacked specificity in their objectives and measures did not typically provide enough direction for lead staff to develop projects, seek out partnerships, or find funding sources. Without this, organizations struggled to develop projects efficiently and effectively and faced more challenges in pursuing partners and funding. When organizations lacked a shared understanding of priorities, this sometimes led to an imbalanced level of board engagement, with either micromanagement of lead and other staff in their daily tasks or limited input from the board with too much workload and direction setting falling on lead staff.

How Have Organizations Created Strategic Plans?

From the case study interviews, we learned that organizations that pursued multiple methods for identifying potential projects were able to develop more informed strategic plans that guided the board in making decisions on project and grant priorities. Lead staff and board members were also better able to identify whether new grant opportunities or project proposals from agency partners, landowners, and other local partners were relevant to pursue based on established priorities.

Organizations used the following information sources in developing strategic plans:

- **Conducted surveys to identify community needs and interests** to ascertain geographic areas of focus, limiting factors, and related project activities. Some interviewees described how they obtained an OWEB stakeholder engagement grant to survey private landowners on their restoration and conservation project interests and needs to establish priorities.
- **Participated in regional information-sharing groups** to remain aware of agency funding priorities and coordinate projects with agency staff and other local partners.
- **Maintained a database of potential projects** that included project priorities, potential funding sources, and landowner, agency, or county staff contact information. Some interviewees stated that they used this to quantify potentially available project work to inform board decisions.

V.C. How Have Organizations Engaged in Partnerships?

Through our case studies, we looked at how organizations typically developed partnerships, how they navigated common challenges in partnership building, and the variety of partnership models organizations engaged in through partnership-focused grants (e.g., OWEB FIP, P-TA, or NRCS RCPP) and other forms of involvement. Partnerships support organizations in leveraging experience, knowledge, and expertise with adjacent councils, districts, and other local conservation partners to plan and implement projects for restoration and conservation actions. Furthermore, partnerships can develop over time as those involved can begin to identify a common understanding of the needs of the landscape, the community, and the available resources and partners to move beyond project to project and towards development of larger-scale restoration and conservation projects. Opportunities and challenges for partnerships vary in different geographical areas and contexts. Depending on the landowners in their watershed, councils and districts need to work across boundaries of federal, state, and local government, as well as private industry (e.g., timber) and private landowners (e.g., ranching, farming). When neighboring landowners differ in their priorities, it can be challenging to implement a program of work across a landscape. However, councils and districts are in a prime position to work towards landscape-scale restoration and conservation through building relationships with the community and agency partners. Geographic areas with a fewer number of landowners may face less complexities in implementing work across a landscape, though the greatest factor still depends on the ability of the organization's lead staff or board to build partnerships.

Organizations Typically Developed Partnerships Through:

- (1) Participation in city or county committees and other local boards to build a reputation in the community**, while serving as a community member. This helped bring capacity to local governments, particularly smaller ones. Some organizations' programs were included in local city budgets, which helped them develop a general fund. *(Note: It took time to build a general operations budget for staff to be paid for their engagement and participation in committees.)*
- (2) Development of strategic action plans with key partners.** Effective organizations developed priorities for the watershed through identification of key players (e.g., main landowners, city/county officials, boards, public events/outreach) to establish joint priorities to acquire funds.
- (3) Referrals from agency partners** connected landowners or non-profits to councils or districts as a better avenue for project work. Councils and districts assisted landowners and other conservation partners in establishing a plan and finding funds. Additionally, councils and districts invited agency partners to board meetings to share updates on funding and project priorities.

- (4) **Development of a community outreach program.** This included hosting regular community events in public spaces to engage landowners, e.g., breweries. When the event was consistent, it built reliability and improved access for community engagement. Some organizations purchased office space downtown to increase community visibility.
- (5) **Sustained ties with past workplaces.** Some partnerships emerged from staff movement between organizations, who maintained connections with past agencies, as well as other councils, districts, and local partners.

Overall, organizations that consistently obtained OWEB large restoration grants or other grants, while also implementing project work in a timely manner, established themselves as reliable and capable. Partners were more willing to provide them with funding for riskier, more complex projects. As one interviewee said, "I think we make a pretty good partnership because if they can find grants, even if I have to match one to one, we can get a lot more done that way. If I just paid for it all, I'd only be able to pay for half of that. It's still done eventually, hopefully, but only at half the rate. They've been awesome, and I hope they never leave. My other wildlife areas that don't really have an active watershed council, it's a lot harder to get large projects done. The watershed council and ODFW have all these projects on the table that we're working on, and it's benefiting the wildlife area and its neighbors, and we are able to combine our budgets to make a larger difference, which is huge."

What are Common Challenges in Partnership Building?

Through our case studies, we found that common challenges organizations faced in partnership building included: (1) staff turnover at partner organizations and (2) historical challenges. In this section, we also look at how organizations navigated these challenges.

Staff Turnover at Partner Organizations

When state and federal agency partners have experienced managerial turnover or when key contacts have left, it has been challenging for councils and districts to maintain these relationships and funding sources. Continuation of partnerships depended on the priorities of new management, i.e., what kinds of restoration and conservation work they wanted to focus on and how they interpreted implementing agency work. Some interviewees discussed how some agency partners wanted to shift from monitoring to implementation, which required the council or district's staff to learn new skills or potentially hire someone with these skills. This was sometimes challenging for organizations in rural areas, which often spoke to difficulties of finding qualified staff. Additionally, some agency staff were less focused on partnership building, which hampered relationships with councils and districts. However, sometimes changes in partners' management had positive impacts if they were more partner-focused, or when the agency itself shifted its priorities to promote partnerships. Lastly, lead staff turnover in adjacent councils and districts who were key partners and experts in a particular restoration or conservation activity affected other councils' and districts' capacity.

“ As one interviewee pointed out, “*We recognize that our partners' capacity has a lot to do with our capacity...A lot of our partner organizations are losing institutional knowledge, as there's been a lot of staffing changes. So, one of the things we're working on at the district is a conservation planning regional training course...We plan to include videos that talk about conservation planning specifics as well as connecting attendees with partner organizations that can talk about their programs. It would be something that we could make available to folks at the Watershed Council, neighboring SWCDs, or other partner organizations when they get new staff members.*”

Protective Factors

Some interviewees spoke to the importance of maintaining connections with partners during times of staffing transitions. Council, district, or agency partners began a relationship with the new personnel by onboarding them on joint project grants, priorities, and the program of work. This included inviting agency partners to attend board meetings or meeting with them individually. One interviewee discussed how an effective strategy for introducing agency partners to councils and districts happened when agencies used their extra funding from staffing vacancies to double-fill the position for the last month. Lastly, some councils and districts participated in group information-sharing networks to stay connected to regional priorities, and project and grant opportunities. This helped them be aware of and adapt to upcoming changes.

Historical Challenges and Opportunities

Some interviewees spoke about challenges they faced in building partnerships with consecutive lead staff turnover or a history of troubled partnerships in an area.

Consecutive Lead Staff Turnover

Some interviewees mentioned how turnover of lead staff or other key staff (e.g., project manager) resulted in a decline in organizational management, particularly when a board was disengaged. Current staff stepped into the role as interim to maintain fiscal management, grant reporting, and project work. However, because of a lack of managerial direction and priority setting, reporting deadlines and contractor payments were missed, projects were derailed and partners were lost. Sometimes, however, changing staff at a council or district allowed for partnership repair by consistently following through on projects, and also established new organizational connections from their past workplaces. These staff also brought new knowledge of available funding resources and strategies for obtaining them, which allowed for organizational expansion over time.

History of Troubled Partnerships

Some councils and districts have faced challenges around an ongoing history of troubled partnerships. This was sometimes challenging for new lead staff to handle; however, sometimes they brought a fresh perspective and rebuilt trust. Some lead staff interviewees engaged in partnership problem-solving by acquiring funding to work on a joint project or through obtaining a monitoring grant to gather and share information that both organizations needed to develop projects. Furthermore, some partner interviewees discussed how they offered joint project funding to organizations that had a troubled history to work together since each had access to valuable skills, knowledge, and community connections necessary to complete the restoration and conservation activities. Through this funding, change of staff, and the necessity to work together, organizations worked towards development of a new narrative. In other instances, organizations brought in outside facilitators to bridge relationships between landowners, agency partners, councils, and districts. Interviewees indicated that these facilitators served as a stepping stone to improving relationships and signified a basic agreement to work together, but a crucial factor was having a key leader who was able to make it work for everyone. Additionally, they described the need for incremental small victories to carry the momentum forward. Interestingly, some interviewees spoke about creating an external group of partners led by a community leader, who had a vision for the watershed, helped reset dynamics in an area, outside of the confines of organizations.

Partnership Models

Diverse models of partnership emerge depending on the relationships built and the needs identified by those involved, and as such, a variety of partnership structures may be best suited for different times and in varied contexts. The Partnership Learning Project referred to the “Continuum of Partnership Types” to identify what OWEB FIP partnerships “needed to be resilient and maintain a high level of performance and impact”.¹⁶ Over time, this model has evolved based on continued conversations with groups to broaden the understanding of partnerships as an evolving process that is neither discrete nor linear and to reflect the level of interdependency and degree of collaboration (See **Figure 16** below). These include learning-oriented partnerships, project-oriented partnerships, planning-oriented partnerships, and systems-oriented partnerships. Learning-oriented partnerships focus on brainstorming ways to improve strategies and practices, but have minimal formal connection or shared work. In project-oriented partnerships, responsibilities are shared for individual projects. In planning-oriented partnerships, partners are engaged in matching their strategies and actions to meet mutual needs for the partnership overall. In systems-oriented partnerships, partners are committed to working together in supportive and integral roles to accomplish a long-term shared vision.

Figure 16. Partnership Types Model.

Partnership Types

Partnerships work at different scales and in different geographies and contexts. Each has a unique structure, function and focus, which may change over time as the work evolves and in response to changes in leadership, new partners, funding, policies, external events, etc.

The partnership types below differ with respect to interdependency. In reality, this is a gradient, not discrete types. With more ambitious goals and greater interdependency, partners take on greater risk to meet shared commitments.

Project-oriented partnerships

Partners remain relatively autonomous and independent, but commit to a set of shared priorities and tasks, typically in response to funding opportunities. Usually there is a small number of partners. A coordinator serves as a project manager, a role which may be rotated among partners.



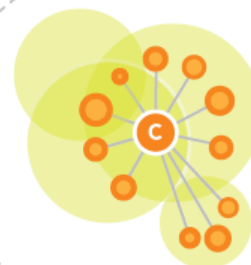
● Partners ● C Coordinator ● \$ Funding

Learning-oriented partnerships

Partners come together with a desire to learn together and tackle shared questions and concerns. Partners remain fully autonomous and independent, but collectively advance their thinking around strategies or practices that each partner can use in their work. A coordinator serves as an ambassador and convener.



Partnership Types



Planning-oriented partnerships

Partners engage in collaborative long-term planning and commit to implementing shared goals and strategies. Individual partner organizations may have to shift their internal priorities and approaches to align with the partnership overall. A high level of sustained funding is required. A coordinator typically serves as facilitator and project manager.



Systems-oriented partnerships

Partners are highly committed to long-term systems change. Partners may have to make substantial changes within their organizations to align with the partnership. A very high level of sustained funding is required to invest in iterative cycles of learning, planning and implementation and to work through differences to achieve alignment. A coordinator serves as facilitator, ambassador and project manager. The complexity of the work may require committees.



Our case study interviews showed three primary ways that organizations sought partnerships:

- (1) **For networks:** Creation of group networks and larger scale network entities.
- (2) **For shared planning:** Development of cross-partner plans such as strategic plans or integrated weed management plans.
- (3) **For resource sharing:** Development of resource sharing arrangements.

Leveraging Networks

Some interviewees described the importance of leveraging experience, knowledge, and expertise with adjacent councils, districts, and other local partners. Some geographic areas have established regional partnerships using OWEB FIP or P-TA grants to develop governance documents (e.g., MOU and bylaws) to define roles, responsibilities, and commitments to build cross-organizational support for landscape-level restoration and conservation. For example, the Upper Willamette Stewardship Network (UWSN), a regional cooperative planning group, has built in planning efficiencies and reduced administrative burden on participating councils and districts, while providing beneficial outcomes for an individual staff member, individual organizations, and the Network as a whole. One of the councils served as the “organizational home” for the Network’s Working Lands program since they had working lands expertise with a dedicated staff member. Other organizations in the Network contracted with them to provide services in their geographic area. This built in job security for the individual, and thereby, the council’s funding for the position, while simultaneously contributing to other organizations’ capacity for projects. Additionally, this reduced duplication of efforts; created regional consistency in program language, development, and implementation; and established a regional point of contact, which supported communication and planning with partners. Furthermore, this staff member became an expert in navigating NRCS, which increased the council’s ability to obtain grants and benefited everyone in the Network to leverage additional funding. Together, this reduced the administrative burden of the involved organizations.

Shared Planning

Some interviewees participated in regional information-sharing groups, which supported streamlining of projects through identification of partners for cost-match and coordination of efforts to work towards landscape-scale restoration and conservation. Examples included council and district-led regional coordination meetings with agency partners through OWEB FIP grants, funder-led regional coordination meetings, and an annual workgroup led by a local NRCS office to provide updates on upcoming funding opportunities. Furthermore, some interviewees were involved in NRCS’ RCPP program to work collaboratively with other local districts or councils on landscape-scale projects with private landowners. Additionally, one interviewee mentioned development of a cross-county regional weed management plan, which enabled the district to work on weed projects with ODA since they lacked a local weed management area.

Resource Sharing

Some interviewees engaged in resource sharing arrangements such as:

- **Split costs for drones or other equipment** that were too costly for a single organization to purchase, but could be shared between each other.
- **Shared staff expertise to provide skills training for other organizations** by contracting them for a project to engage in on-the-job learning.
- **Shared a grant writer**, whose position was housed in one organization, but was contracted out with other nearby organizations.
- **Developed a lending library of educational materials** that were available for partners to borrow, covering topics such as landowner materials, soil health, and more.



Youth outreach in Port Orford. credit: curry SWCD.

V.D. What Funding Strategies Have Organizations Used?

This section builds on the previous section by highlighting how organizations strategically identify, obtain, and leverage available funding resources to work with partners while maintaining awareness of their own capacity. From the case study organizations we interviewed, we learned about how organizations diversified funders; how they relied on community, board, and network relationships to find additional funding; and how they navigated a variable funding landscape, while maintaining relationships with partners.

Strategic Pursuit of Grants

Lead staff described the need to assess their organizational and staffing capacity to identify what amount of grant work they can reasonably manage at a given time, the importance of strategic plan development to guide grant processes, and the creation of funding spreadsheets to track potential opportunities.

Assessment of Staffing and Organizational Capacity

Interviewees discussed the need to strategize which grants to apply for since grant writing required significant staff time, which could not be charged to another grant. Interviewees also voiced a need to not apply for more grants than they were able to manage at once, even when a grant was directly relevant to their priorities. Some mentioned learning to budget for more project management time in their grant applications, which helped build additional capacity for projects. Specific to new federal grants, some described the importance of working with partners to determine if grants were significantly aligned with their priorities and worth the “risk” of staff time to pursue these. Interviewees also described fatigue and challenges with funders only wanting to fund innovative, “new and shiny” projects. Some interviewees perceived their watershed as less competitive for funders’ grant priorities and that they had less innovative or interesting projects that were still essential for their geography.

Development of Strategic Plans and Funding Opportunities Spreadsheet

Some interviewees described how strategic plans directed their pursuit of grants through identification of watershed goals and related project priorities, objectives, and measurable outcomes. By engaging in a strategic planning process, staff and boards were better positioned to recognize relevant grant opportunities and write more informed, detailed grants that were more likely to obtain funding. Alongside strategic planning, some interviewees developed a funding opportunities spreadsheet that they periodically updated to keep track of grants, deadlines, key contacts, and connections between funders' priorities and their strategic plans. Some indicated the need to develop a grant timeline to see when a funder was likely to solicit funds. These spreadsheets were created by researching opportunities online, attending webinars to learn about grants, or “cold-calling” funders to develop relationships. Lead staff interviewees indicated that it became easier to identify relevant grants over time as they built up an understanding of watershed needs through strategic plan development.

Additionally, one interviewee described how they created a simple watershed map with an overlay of funding sources (e.g., OWEB FIP, ODA Strategic Implementation Area, or NRCS RCPP) to identify needs addressed by those grants. Another interviewee discussed how they developed a regional OWEB grants database to see trends in match percentage, types of projects being awarded, and how many of each type. This informed them on what grants to apply for by learning what projects were more likely to be funded. This was particularly useful since some projects may have only required a 15% match, but some applicants have secured a much higher match, which may reduce the organization’s likelihood of attaining the grant. Additionally, some interviewees spoke with funders to determine why their grant was unsuccessful (e.g., quality of grant writing or if the project was not a current priority). They saved these as “drafts” for future grants.

Diversifying Funders for Short- and Long-Term Funding Needs

Some interviewees described how they developed a funding plan to address short- and long-term needs. Short-term funding necessities included items like staff payroll, rent, and contractor payments. Long-term funding focused on the development of additional revenue streams to diversify funding sources outside of OWEB. These interviewees mentioned how strategic planning sessions with the board and lead staff were the most useful time

to discuss this. Some board and partner interviewees indicated that prior lead staff or board members lacked the skills or ability to manage this level of complexity in grant and project management, which made it challenging to obtain OWEB funding for projects. To address this, some board members shared that during times of lead staff transitions, they focused on hiring someone who was able to guide the organization in this direction. Interviewees also highlighted the importance of being networked in the community to learn about diverse funding opportunities. Examples included: federal and state agencies, private foundations, and local community institutions that sponsored non-profits (e.g., banks, grocery stores, or breweries), as well as annual fundraising events with local partners and fostering of city/county government relations for inclusion of their programs in local government budgets. Furthermore, interviewees discussed how funding from local community institutions, local government budgets, and fundraising events served as unrestricted funds to support operational costs and supplemented the Operating Capacity grants. Additionally, some organizations have maintained an annual federally negotiated indirect cost rate agreement to support critical operation costs. However, it is important to recognize that some geographic areas will likely always face challenges with diversifying funding outside of OWEB based on fewer available resources. This is described in more detail in the section, “Navigating a Variable Funding Landscape.”

Relying on Community, Board, and Network Relationships

Community Focus

Some interviewees described the importance of developing landowner connections that emphasized conservation problem identification and being solution-oriented by developing plans and obtaining funding. This was especially useful in navigating community distrust of agencies, who were perceived as “enforcers” and “regulators.” Some shared how this approach encouraged previously disinterested landowners to discuss issues in managing their property.

Board Connections

Specific to councils, lead staff members have often been essential for identifying potential funding sources and maintaining relationships with partners. However, some interviewees described how board connections have played a role by attending fundraising and other key events, attaching personal notes to known recipients for end-of-year fundraising letters, and reaching out to personal contacts to attain additional funding. Additionally, some board members were aware of funding sources from federal and state agencies based on their work experiences.

Network Relationships

Some interviewees mentioned participation in quarterly or annual regional information-sharing groups, led by agencies, tribes, councils, and districts, helped them learn about funding opportunities, coordinate projects, and identify partners for project cost-match. Some noted that OWEB P-TA and FIP grants helped support funding for a partnership coordinator, who helped identify larger funding opportunities for multiple organizations (e.g., JDBP and UWSN).

Maintaining Relationships with Funding Partners

Case study interviewees discussed the importance of maintaining relationships with federal, state, and local government funding partners, as well as the need to continually build relationships with new funders. Partnership building was achieved by gaining a reputation for consistently obtaining grants, reliably meeting project deadlines, communicating as changes occurred, and implementing quality work on the ground. Lead staff interviewees discussed how this led to new opportunities. They indicated that federal agencies often have

trouble getting funding on the ground, so they have sometimes asked partners to develop and apply for federal grants. Additionally, federal and state agency partners sometimes developed a pre-written OWEB grant application for lead staff to revise and submit since state and federal entities have historically been ineligible to apply for OWEB grants. Some interviewees also described the importance of establishing trust with local partners. One interviewee shared how they called their local partners when they needed project work for their staff, e.g., maintenance of past riparian or weed management projects, as well as simply asking if there was any relevant work that needed to be completed. This proactive approach helped lead staff to identify short-term funding opportunities that supported the staff member, the organization, and the partner. Additionally, interviewees spoke about the need to continue building relationships with new funders, since external funding sources have typically been tied to projects and have not been meant to serve as ongoing, programmatic support. As one interviewee said, “You’re always building relationships, maintaining relationships, and ending relationships with funders.” Because of this reality, they pointed to the essential need for district and Council Capacity grants to maintain a base of support.

Navigating a Variable Funding Landscape

Interviewees described challenges around changes in external funders’ priorities as well as access to funding opportunities. Some discussed how they lost funding sources that were once reliable for up to 10 years after external funders shifted their focus from one particular geographic area or type of restoration/conservation work to another. Additionally, when state and federal agencies have received an increase in dollars earmarked for restoration and conservation activities, they have often depended on councils and districts as community-based partners who can expand agency capacity to develop and implement projects. As smaller organizations, it can be difficult for them to adapt to these needs and benefit from these resources. Councils and districts, particularly lead staff, have always needed to manage this consistent ebb and flow. Additionally, it is important to note that some geographic areas have had greater access to funding opportunities (e.g., taxing districts; BPA; and species-specific funds for salmon, steelhead, sage-grouse, and other agency regional funding priorities). Interviewees in some rural communities have also had fewer available local organizations to partner with on projects, little to no local foundations, and a lack of local government funding for conservation. Furthermore, they often described the difficulties of finding or retaining qualified staff, which affected their ability to manage and obtain larger grants. Some interviewees indicated that a lack of funding sources encouraged them to work with local partners more, while others spoke to the challenges of perceiving each other as competition for funding. This seemed to vary based on how an organization viewed the role of partnerships.

Lastly, taxing districts sometimes developed their own program of partner support funding to act as a “mini-foundation,” which established an additional funding source for local partners or private landowners. Interviewees discussed how their taxing district-funded programs were more accessible than federal and other large funders. They described how it was easier for landowners to obtain funding and reporting requirements were less complex. This increased landowner interest in project development. Furthermore, local, non-profit partners who received these grants obtained year-round support for staff, rather than seasonal, which they viewed as providing regional uplift. Interviewees also indicated that strategic direction and leadership from the lead staff and board were necessary to effectively use these resources.



Restoration and Stewardship Team strategizing together. credit: Upper Willamette Stewardship Network.

VI. Discussion

In this review of OWEB’s Operating Capacity investments, we learned that these grants have positively impacted communities’ local economies, supported local conservation efforts in completing restoration and conservation projects, and helped build local capacity among conservation partners. Furthermore, the reliability of this grants program has served as an essential strategy for supporting council and district operations, as many grantees expressed the lack of sufficient external capacity-building funding in the face of rising costs and inflation. The Operating Capacity grant programs have supported OWEB and ODA as state agencies in meeting state-wide restoration and conservation goals. Without this funding, many councils and districts would not be able to maintain their operations because restoration and conservation activities can require months or years of networking, planning, and leveraging projects—which cannot be charged to restoration or conservation project grants. This would have negative repercussions on conservation efforts at the local level and limit the capacity of other state and federal agency natural resource partners to achieve state and federal restoration and conservation goals. Councils and districts have primarily used Operating Capacity grants for project development and partnership building, as initial funds for project cash match, and as operational support for administrative staff time and staff training. Other assessments also note that capacity investments have had positive ripple effects on watershed enhancement work more broadly. “Time, effort, and organizational capacity is needed to apply for OWEB grants. Partners that Tribes collaborate with on OWEB-funded projects often have more time and infrastructure devoted to grant writing than they do. Interviewees believed tribal contribution comes in the form of technical expertise, setting overall strategic goals, writing letters of support, and reviewing and improving existing grant applications.” - [Granting Practices Impacts to Tribes: An Assessment of OWEB \(2021\)](#)

Capacity is the largest challenge that organizations face as the complexity of the issues they address are increasing from a growing understanding of the impacts of climate change, which have caused drier summers, droughts, and more frequent wildfires in geographic regions that have not typically seen this. Furthermore, the retirement of staff across multiple agencies, combined with the difficulty of offering competitive wages and benefits for staff retention, and the effects of elevated housing values and other costs of living, even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, have further challenged councils and districts. They often serve as small, front-line organizations for large-scale issues, working across multiple agencies, non-profits, local governments, and private landowners, at the intersection of natural resource management and community outreach and education.

Additionally, during times of an influx in federal and state dollars that emphasize implementing restoration and conservation projects, agencies often rely on councils and districts as necessary community-based partners. Some communities have also seen a shift in restoration and conservation needs that are driven by changes in land use from agriculture and ranching to an increase in recreation, while needing to address the needs of existing working lands and ongoing habitat conservation for salmon, sage-grouse, and other important species. Lastly, the increasingly technical aspects of project permitting and grant reporting requirements, while improving accountability, monitoring, and performance, have increased administrative burden. All of these factors point to the essential purposes these organizations serve and the capacity challenges they face. Councils and districts rely on committed individuals who are relationship-oriented, and driven by conservation and community.

The case study approach helped us define common experiences and challenges of councils and districts. However, we recognize that councils and districts have a diversity of experiences and contexts within which they function. To improve the application of findings, we selected case study organizations across Oregon with different staffing levels across typologies, in rural and urban contexts, and with varying tiers of resources obtained and leveraged. We followed an approach that could be conducted within the timeframe of the project since it would not be possible to interview all organizations. Furthermore, during the interview process, we noted that we had identified enough common insights and themes, within and across organizations and capacity dimensions, through thematic coding and memo writing.

From this evaluation, we learned that governance is fluid because relationships are fluid. Councils and districts have often heavily depended on a single individual (i.e., the district manager or council executive director) to build relationships and develop a strategic vision for the organization and the watershed with partners and funders, while simultaneously pursuing grants and managing projects. Specific to councils, the lead staff position title itself has evolved over time to recognize the full spectrum of work that this role fulfills – from secretary to coordinator to executive director. Because these organizations have limited staffing capacity, the ways that each organization governed itself was based on an iterative process that those individuals worked through together. Some organizations needed more structure than others, depending on the communication, needs, and level of trust among the individuals involved, while some needed less. Some organizations started with more structure, but as trust was built through relationships, the need for structure decreased. This was particularly true for organizations that had multiple opportunities for communication through built structural support and proximity, within and across organizations. Peer learning networks and other partnership models eased lead staff transitions through mentorship, shared resources, and project coordination. These groups also offered overlapping points of connection and communication to create a community network of local conservation partners.

At the individual organizational level, common issues that reduced organizational capacity included: a disengaged board or board micromanagement of lead staff, lead staff turnover and capacity, and challenges with finding qualified staff.

- **A disengaged board was less involved with providing organizational direction through strategic plans and offered less accountability of lead staff's work plans.** This sometimes led to reduced lead staff capacity or burn-out. These boards were also less engaged in effective fiscal oversight and less aware of how to maintain consistent funding revenue. In these contexts, the board was more focused on project implementation than organizational management.

- **When a board micromanaged lead staff, some grantees’ experienced organizational gridlock.** In these circumstances, there was a lack of joint organizational priority setting for strategic plans and/or annual work plans. This sometimes resulted in burn-out or reduced capacity of lead staff.
- **Regardless of whether a board was disengaged or micromanaging, roles and responsibilities of the board and lead staff were unclear. Additionally, board members were unsure of how to manage lead staff personnel issues or engage in organizational management.** Reduced capacity or burn-out of lead staff sometimes led to turnover of lead staff or a need for someone with a different set of skills to improve the organization.
- **Board members were concerned that they would not be able to find replacement staff** given the challenges of offering competitive wages and benefits for lead staff, given the grant-funded nature of these positions. Challenges with lead staff transitions or navigating the need for lead staff with a different set of skills sometimes caused an organizational downward cycle. This made partners less likely to work with them, which led to missed opportunities for projects and funding.

At the individual organizational level, key opportunities for building organizational capacity included: joint priority setting between lead staff and board through strategic plan development, targeted board recruitment and diversification of funding, development of an effectively engaged board, and follow-through on projects.

- **Lead staff and boards co-established organizational and watershed priorities through strategic planning processes.** This streamlined pursuit of key partnerships and funding sources for projects, improved organizational fiscal efficiency, helped organizations design stronger grant proposals, and more effectively use funders’ resources. Joint-priority setting supported board and lead staff in creating a shared understanding of what a manageable project workload was while keeping everyone aligned on organizational priorities. Together these supported an effective level of board engagement. Furthermore, strategic planning sessions sometimes focused on how to diversify funders for short- and long-term organizational funding needs.
- **Lead staff engaged in targeted board recruitment by forming a network** within the community through participation and hosting of community events. These served as opportunities to identify potential board members who could help organizations meet goals in their strategic plans and strengthen information sharing across agencies.
- **Being networked in the community also allowed them to learn about diverse funding opportunities.** Examples included: federal and state agencies, private foundations, and local community institutions that sponsored non-profits (e.g., banks, grocery stores, or breweries), as well as annual fundraising events with local partners and fostering of city/county government relations for inclusion of their programs in local government budgets. Additionally, some organizations developed an annual federally negotiated indirect cost rate agreement to support critical operation costs to build administrative capacity.
- **Lead staff developed board relationships by incorporating education and training into board meetings** so they were able to mutually support each other in their respective roles to guide the organization’s trajectory.

At the community level, common issues that reduced organizational capacity included: staff turnover at partner organizations, a history of troubled partnerships, and access to funding resources.

- **Capacity does not occur in a vacuum.** Lead staff turnover in adjacent councils and districts who were key partners and experts in a particular restoration or conservation activity affected other councils’ and districts’ capacity. This reduced their ability to leverage grants and implement project work.

- **Areas with a history of troubled partnerships were sometimes challenging to overcome** which hampered relationships with other partners and funders, who had difficulties with completing project work they were interested in and wanted to fund.
- **Access to funding resources.** As third-party researchers, it is challenging to give the full context of each region's available opportunities given the differing land uses, endangered species, and other items tied to funding sources because there are a wide variety of factors and those factors evolve over time. Additionally, funders have become interested in more innovative and collaborative projects and increased leveraging of funds, which can create a perception that councils and districts have to "keep up." Lead staff have always needed to manage this consistent ebb and flow in funders' priorities, even before the COVID-19 pandemic. Regardless, the variability of funding sources is an inherent challenge that affects community capacity.

At the community level, key opportunities for building organizational capacity included: proactively maintaining partnerships during times of staff turnover, resolving a history of troubled partnerships, and participating in various partnership models to share resources.

- **Regional network formation, shared planning, and the development of resource-sharing arrangements were the most typical ways that organizations built community capacity.** Some areas established regional partnerships using OWEB FIP or P-TA grants to develop governance documents and define commitments to build cross-organizational support for landscape-level restoration and conservation. Some participated in regional information-sharing groups, which supported streamlining of projects through the identification of partners for cost-match and coordination of efforts to work towards landscape-scale restoration and conservation. Others shared equipment costs and staffing.
- **Onboarding new personnel following staff turnover at partner organizations on their joint projects and priorities.** Lead staff that engaged in these practices were able to maintain their partnerships during these transition periods.
- **Acquisition of joint funding for a project or sharing information learned from a monitoring program helped organizations rebuild trust after a history of troubled partnerships.** This often included a change in staff leadership, as well, who were not invested in this history.



Range Monitoring Tour. credit: South Fork John Day WC.

VII. Considerations and Proposed Recommendations

Considerations and potential recommendations were developed for points of impact that agencies and supporting organizations can provide, as well as best practices for council and district grantees.

VII.A. Points of Impact: Agencies and Service Providers

Coordinate Across Agencies and Improve Cross-agency Understanding of Grantees' Needs

Based on the case study interviews, there is a demonstrated need to improve awareness of what NOWC, OrCP, OCEAN, and the SWCD Operations Specialist provide, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic has altered what was offered over the last few years. Furthermore, according to the NOWC Membership Outreach Consultancy Report (2021), "less than 15% of members are aware of any of the items [NOWC provides] including document templates, which is one of the primary benefits that NOWC provides to its members."¹⁶ Reconnecting with councils and districts to share what these organizations offer is important, especially as more in-person events are happening, which offer additional opportunities for peer networking and information sharing. Lastly, it is important to recognize that not all lead staff step into these roles with a background in project management or organizational management, which are essential functions for this position, and must learn as they go.

Topical Needs Identified by Grantees:

- OWEB-specific and general grant writing and reporting requirement courses.
- Fiscal management and terminology.
- Best practices or examples of organizational policies, procedures, and bylaws.
- Board management and education.
- Personnel management and handling lead staff transitions.
- Direction on how to develop a balanced project workload for lead staff, while also navigating the management of multiple projects.
- Guidance on developing unrestricted funding sources to help maintain critical operations (e.g., development of an annual federally negotiated indirect cost rate agreement, budgeting for more project time in grant applications to build in additional capacity for projects).

¹⁶ NOWC Membership Outreach Consultancy Report (2021)

Potential Strategies to Address Identified Needs

Some grantees were interested in engaging in a regional forum to learn from other councils or districts. Suggestions included: a show and tell with an OWEB Regional Representative to help organize groups by region. Interestingly, this mimics what some places with a higher concentration of councils and districts are doing, (e.g., the UWSN and JDBP). This could potentially be useful if organizations are facing challenges in working with local partners and developing joint priorities.

NOWC could play a key role in supporting peer regional forums for councils, because their board includes regional representatives and they support regional peer networking groups. Additionally, they have created a NOWC Insider Webinar series addressing a variety of topics with content experts to discuss nonprofit board governance, legal issues, financial best practices, and other relevant needs. It is important to note, however, that these services would be limited to paying NOWC members, because they are dependent upon membership fees to support their operations and part time coordinator.

Another strategy could be for OWEB to engage the ODA's SWCD Operations Specialist's skills to develop regional round-table trainings for lead staff focusing on management topics. Trainings could be joint for councils and districts or separate. Additionally, interviewees were interested in being able to connect directly with OWEB and ODA staff, so it would be important to consider their involvement. Hosting regional in-person forums could be particularly beneficial for organizations in more rural areas, who typically have to travel further and face greater travel costs for professional networking opportunities. Lastly, new lead staff may have different needs than those who have been in this position longer. This emphasizes the importance of mentorship and peer learning networks to create information exchanges and learn from each other's experiences.

Strategic Planning

As part of the Council Capacity grant application and review process, requiring greater specificity in strategic plans or annual work plans, depending on the function of these plans for an organization, could allow for objectives and measures on how councils are identifying and implementing watershed restoration and conservation activities, while engaging with partners. Council Capacity grant Merit Criterion 2: Progress in Planning, currently states, "The council uses its planning documents, such as the action plan, strategic plan, and other relevant documents, to identify and implement on-the-ground watershed restoration and stakeholder engagement projects. The council regularly evaluates its action plan and work plans and makes adjustments to respond to changes and challenges."¹⁷ Strategic plan and annual work plan guidance could account for the differences in how organizations use these plans in different ways depending on their local context, while also emphasizing how planning processes for these can help establish expectations between board and staff of what amount and type of project work is manageable based on staffing capacity, as well as create a shared understanding of priorities to promote an effective level of engagement between board and lead staff.

Technical and Financial Support

Councils and districts can benefit from technical and financial support to assist them in strategic planning processes to incorporate diverse perspectives and needs and engage in relevant technical expertise for identifying geographic priorities. Interviewees have expressed interest in live webinars and being able to address questions in real-time for learning best practices and how to improve organizational efficiencies. NOWC and OrCP currently offer ongoing webinar training opportunities. Additionally, some councils and districts engage in peer

¹⁷ [FY 21-23 OWEB Operating Capacity Grant Guidance](#)

learning networks to learn from each other's experiences and share examples of lessons they have learned in NOWC and OrCP webinars, as well as CONNECT and OACD conferences. NOWC has self-funded a "watershed camp" for council staff that provides management peer training, mentoring for new staff, and technical training in collaboration with state and federal agency staff. Strategic planning processes could help organizations develop clearly measurable objectives; determine short, medium, and long-term project priorities; and identify potential partnerships and funding sources. This may help grantees, particularly lead staff, to gain valuable insight into project development, management, and implementation, while making the best use of OWEB's various grants in project design (e.g., technical assistance, stakeholder engagement, monitoring, and restoration).

Board Management

We heard from interviewees as well as from the survey findings that councils and districts noted challenges around board member training. We also heard webinars would allow for increased opportunities to meet the scheduling needs of retired or working board members. Key training areas included: strategic plans, organizational policies and procedures, fiscal responsibilities, and personnel management of lead staff ([See Section V, Table 14](#)). Additionally, lead staff that developed an engaged board often incorporated brief, 15-30 minute training modules into board meetings. Grantees may benefit from board training guidance and resources available from ODA, NOWC, and OrCP. Considering that lead staff capacity and turnover are common organizational challenges, this emphasizes the importance of continually promoting relevant and available resources for lead staff.

Staff Benefits and Retirement

We often heard from interviewees that a piece of lead staff succession planning and staff retention revolves around pay, health benefits, and retirement, which are further challenged by the rising costs of living and housing in Oregon, even before the COVID-19 pandemic. This is particularly applicable to councils, which are 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations. It can be challenging to maintain organizational longevity when lead staff leaves to seek out positions with increased pay and benefits. Additionally, based on the survey results, less than half of councils and districts indicated that they had succession planning or mentorship for lead staff, or succession planning for board members. Furthermore, only 47% of councils and 63% of districts indicated that they had competitive salaries and benefits compared to similar types of organizations. Most interviews with board members and partnering organizations recognized that lead staff often move onto conservation jobs elsewhere, while simultaneously relying on them as essential partners for watershed restoration and conservation, given their relationships with the local community.

Coordinating Across Agencies

It is challenging for councils and districts, as smaller organizations, to be able to afford the purchase of group health insurance for their staff, as they are working within a grant-funded framework. Some interviewees mentioned interest in a toolkit or an online resource page for how to incorporate health and retirement benefits into their organization. An online resource page could include relevant, available resources from the NOWC Insider Webinar Series or OrCP webinar archive. Additionally, some councils and districts have participated in peer learning networks to learn from each other's experiences and share examples of lessons they have learned in NOWC and OrCP webinars, as well as CONNECT and OACD conferences. Lastly, councils and districts may benefit from legal experts sharing their advice and tips, while answering questions in real-time.

Coordinating with and Educating External Funders on the Significance of Longer-Term Funding

As part of the external capacity-building program review, we learned that other funders (e.g., the Ford Family Foundation and the Wilburforce Foundation), recognize the need to develop longer-term funding strategies that can support longer-term partnerships. They also acknowledge the need to collaborate with other funders to ensure that collective investments and capacity resources are coordinated and effective. OWEB and ODA have provided ongoing, programmatic support for 20 years to councils and districts' efforts in improving local watershed quality and health. OWEB has developed longer-term funding strategies to help support grantees in partnership capacity and larger landscape-scale restoration (P-TA and FIP grants), while NRCS has developed RCPP grants to support collaboration with other councils and districts for landscape-scale conservation projects with private landowners. External funders often see OWEB and ODA as essential funding partners for restoration and conservation activities through these locally based councils and districts. As such, OWEB can play a role in educating funders on the significance of longer-term grants to work toward landscape-scale restoration and conservation.

VII.B. Best Practices: Council and District Grantees

Strategic Plans

Strategic plans support organizational efficiencies, can reduce lead staff burn-out through joint priority setting between staff and board, and provide a framework for developing annual work plans. The planning processes for these are shaped by their regional contexts, are varied based on the organization's structure, and serve different functions depending on how the organization is managed. Strategic plans, may have more detail or less, depending on these factors. Overall, strategic plans guide organizations by creating a vision to guide restoration and conservation priorities in the basin. Some organizations may find a more detailed strategic plan to be more useful in defining priorities between the lead staff and the board, while others may need a strategic plan with a wider scope to be able to capture funding opportunities that arise, and instead use their annual work plans to inform the more nuanced details. Regardless of which planning model that is used, identifying key partnerships and funding sources for project and/or program development, along with joint priority setting to define short, medium, and long-term priorities helps organizations to establish a shared understanding between the board and staff of what amount and type of restoration and conservation activities are achievable based on staffing capacity, and can inform which grants to pursue and when to do so. Together, these strategies can help reduce the chances of lead staff burnout and turnover.

Board Recruitment and Management

Boards affect organizational trajectory through the composition of their members, the functions they serve, their level of engagement in establishing organizational direction and priorities for the watershed, and most importantly, the relationships they develop with lead staff. Well-functioning organizations have proactively shaped the organization through targeted recruitment. Some organizations have accounted for staff time in their operational budget to participate in local boards and committees and attend community events to develop a network with the intention to identify potential board members and encourage their involvement in projects to cultivate a pool of potential candidates for current or future board vacancies. By using targeted recruitment with the intention of relationship building, some organizations have found that they were able to develop an effectively engaged board. When board positions were only posted or spread by word of mouth, organizations typically had a less diverse board. (**It is important to note that organizations built up their operational budget over time to pay for staff time to participate in local boards and committees.*) Part of targeted recruitment included identifying potential candidates who could help them meet goals in their strategic plans or could

improve communication and information sharing across agencies and industries. Furthermore, developing board diversity allowed lead staff to engage with multiple board members for guidance and brainstorming. When there were too many people with the same knowledge and skills, there was less feedback for decision-making, which could lead to gridlock, since individuals tended to view and problem-solve similarly. In more rural and remote areas, board members noted they have a diverse skill set in terms of holding multiple roles in a given community (e.g., rancher and business owner).

Districts have faced additional challenges in board recruitment, given the legal requirements of owning or managing 10 acres of land to be eligible for zone directorship. To work around these, some districts have recruited individuals who do not meet these legal requirements to attend board meetings and become associate or at-large directors instead. This strategy can support a greater diversity of skills, knowledges, perspectives, and experiences in board composition. After one year, these positions become eligible for zone director elections as long as they are a registered voter who lives within the zone they represent, and have a conservation plan approved by the district.

To develop an effectively engaged board, lead staff included 15-30-minute skills training and educational talks (e.g., personnel and fiscal management) into board meetings. This assisted boards in understanding their roles and responsibilities and how to provide organizational direction setting. They also invited agency staff or other relevant experts to provide project updates and upcoming funding opportunities to help boards understand regional priorities. This enabled boards to make informed decisions on project and funding priorities. This helped establish a healthy relationship and better define expectations between the board and lead staff.

Education and Outreach

We often heard from councils and districts about the lack of OWEB funding for community outreach and education activities due to statute.¹⁸ A key piece of conservation is educating the public about local resources, forming connections to the place they live, and demonstrating how they can engage the local community in voluntary watershed restoration and conservation. Furthermore, education and outreach are important ways for organizations to broaden their networks, develop partnerships, and secure funding. Funding for education and outreach supports their work with agency partners to engage the local community and host community events, which allows them to tap into other communities. To address the lack of funding, some organizations have looked to private foundations, while some districts with tax bases have developed their own grant program for education and outreach funding. Lastly, organizations can partner with OSU Extension.

Fiscal Management

Well-functioning organizations budget more project management time into grant applications to build additional capacity for projects and consider future costs and expenses (e.g., staff wages and materials). Some organizations have also developed an annual federally negotiated indirect cost rate agreement to support critical operation

¹⁸ Refer to Measure 76 and ORS 541.956, which authorize OWEB to make grants available for outreach activities that are necessary for carrying out eligible restoration and acquisition projects that protect or restore native fish or wildlife habitat, or that protect or restore natural watershed or ecosystem functions to improve water quality or stream flows. To qualify as necessary for restoration or acquisition, the project must be tied to a specific geography, address clearly articulated habitat or watershed or ecosystem function goals for that geography, and identify a clear path toward achieving the restoration or acquisition measurable outcomes within a reasonable and specific timeframe. Projects whose primary purpose are education are not eligible.

costs. Furthermore, some organizations build their operational budget over time so they can pay lead staff and other project managers to participate in local committees, boards, and foundations, or attend local events. Through these avenues, staff can build relationships, discover joint priorities with potential partners, develop projects, and acquire funds.

Partnerships

Effective organizations assess the complexity of current projects and staffing capacity prior to pursuing additional grant funding to create a feasible project workload. Maintaining this awareness supports them in pursuing grants strategically, while being consistent in obtaining and managing grants to implement project work in a timely manner. Consistency builds trust with partners and helps them to establish themselves as reliable and capable partners, which attracts more funding from partners. By building this trust, partners may seek them out or be willing to take on riskier, more complex projects over time.

Well-functioning organizations manage staff turnover at partner organizations by orienting new personnel to the program of work, joint project grants, and priorities. This includes inviting agency partners to attend board meetings or meeting with them individually. Additionally, these organizations participate in regional group networks to share information and stay connected to regional priorities, as well as project and grant opportunities. This relationship-building can help organizations to be aware of and adapt to upcoming changes.

To work towards improving relationships with partners who have troubled histories, lead staff or partners have obtained funding to work together on a joint project or use a monitoring grant to collect and share information that both organizations need to develop projects. Through sharing knowledge and joint project funding, organizations have worked towards repairing organizational relationships. This helped support the capacity of the entities involved since each had access to valuable skills, knowledge, and community connections necessary to complete the restoration and conservation activities.

Personnel Management

Organizations with an effectively engaged board have been better positioned to make challenging HR decisions regarding the organization's budgetary and project needs and re-evaluate necessary skills for staff positions, to accommodate shifts in an organization's trajectory. Additionally, they recognize when and how to support, lay off, or fire staff as needed.

VII.C. Proposed Metrics Scorecard

This project focused on five dimensions of organizational and partnership capacities related to the watershed restoration and conservation contexts in which councils and districts work. After completing our analysis and discussions with the Core Project Committee and Advisory Group, we developed a proposed metrics scorecard that OWEB could use to strengthen tracking for the Operating Capacity grant program. These were developed from strategies used by case study organizations to improve organizational efficacy and handle common capacity issues, as well as lessons learned from analyzing the case study interviews and input from the Core Project Committee (**Table 5**). **Note: The proposed qualitative indicators are not an exhaustive list, nor are they "check boxes;" rather, they are meant to provide a more nuanced understanding of how well an organization is functioning to provide more guidance for OWEB and ODA staff engaged in supporting councils and districts.*

Table 5. Revised Capacity Dimensions, Indicators, and Metrics.

Organizational Capacity

Capacity Dimension:

Internal Governance & Operational Practices

Evidence of Ability to:

Manage people and resources Accountability

Proposed Qualitative Indicators: **Well-Functioning**

Development of a strategic planning process that is adapted to the organizational structure and management, as well as available funding opportunities within organizations' regional contexts.

- (1) For ex: Regions with more funding opportunities may benefit from more detailed strategic plans that incorporate diverse perspectives and needs, and engage relevant technical expertise to identify geographic project and/or programmatic priorities, potential partnerships, and funding sources. These priorities could be laid out as short, medium, and long-term goals that describe how they will result in tangible benefits or improvements, along with clearly measurable objectives.
- (2) For ex: Regions with more limited funding opportunities may develop strategic plans that are wider in scope, while covering organizational history, land uses, and limiting factors. The strategic plan then serves as a litmus test to see if emergent opportunities fit into the strategic plan goals and needs, while accounting for constraints described in the plan. From this strategic plan, lead staff develop a more detailed annual work plan to establish geographic project and/or programmatic priorities, potential partnerships, and funding sources. These priorities could be laid out as short, medium, and long-term goals that describe how they will result in tangible benefits or improvements, along with clearly measurable objectives.

Consistent implementation of governing policies and procedures, bylaws. Revising these in regular intervals (e.g., every 5 years).

Lead staff engaging in active board management through integrating educational talks by agency experts into board meetings to help boards make informed decisions on funding and project priorities.

Ability to make necessary HR decisions regarding the organization's budgetary and project needs, and re-evaluating necessary skills for staff positions, to accommodate shifts in an organization's trajectory. Additionally, recognizing when and how to support, lay off, or fire staff as needed.

Capacity Dimension:

Resources Obtained & Leveraged

Evidence of Ability to:

Attract investment and support (crosswalk with partnership capacities)

Proposed Qualitative Indicators: Well-Functioning

Having a general knowledge of available funding (e.g., periodically updated spreadsheet), ensuring consistent revenue streams, and developing a long-term plan to diversify funding sources.

Assessing complexity of current projects and staffing capacity to better define a feasible project workload and avoid overcommitting. Then with this knowledge, consistently obtaining restoration and conservation grants and implementing project work in a timely fashion to build trust with partners, which can lead to more complex, riskier projects with more funding.

Budgeting for more project management time in grant applications to build additional operational capacity for projects, as well as, considering future costs and expenses (e.g., staff wages and materials).

Capacity Dimension:

Adaptive & Resilient Governance

Evidence of Ability to:

Respond to challenges, changing needs and opportunities

Proposed Qualitative Indicators: Well-Functioning

Being networked in the community through participation in local boards and committees to create a pool of potential board members for future vacancies, as well as future staff positions.

Developing a lead staff succession plan (e.g., identifying potential staff who can be trained in lead staff roles and responsibilities).

Developing an engaged board through targeted recruitment and board education training to shift from a stakeholder board to governing board.

Creating an online shared drive of important organizational and project documents to smooth lead staff transitions.

Partnership Capacity

Capacity Dimension:

Types of Partners Engaged

Evidence of Ability to:

Work with all necessary types of partners relevant to watershed restoration / conservation in a given geography

Proposed Qualitative Indicators: **Well-Functioning**

Building and maintaining strong relationships with funders, decision-makers, and project partners.

Increasing communication, cooperation, and collaboration with funders, decision-makers, and project partners.

Participating in local committees and boards, attending events to build an organizational reputation, and meeting with landowners to discover joint priorities to acquire funds and develop projects.

Identifying key partners who have access to the information the organization needs and developing a network of relationships to obtain multiple perspectives on how to develop and implement projects.

Diversifying and expanding types of restoration and conservation activities based on landscape needs (e.g., stream restoration, uplands, etc.) over time to engage additional partners.

Engaging key decision-makers in strategic planning processes to develop watershed priorities.

Continuing partnerships during times of turnover at partnering agencies and other local partners, e.g., introducing them to project work and grants.

Facilitating and coordinating public messaging with partners (e.g., strengthening the feedback loop between resource managers and community members).

Capacity Dimension:

Partnership Types Engaged In

Proposed Qualitative Indicators: **Well-Functioning**

Diversifying and expanding types of restoration and conservation activities to increase project complexity through group partnership networks, e.g., tying smaller projects into larger, landscape-scale restoration and conservation projects. Increasing communication, cooperation, and collaboration with funders, decision-makers, and project partners.

Participating in regional coordination and information-sharing groups to be connected to regional priorities, funding, and partnership opportunities, and to learn from each other's skills and experiences. Identifying key partners who have access to the information the organization needs and developing a network of relationships to obtain multiple perspectives on how to develop and implement projects.

Evidence of Ability to:

Use partnership types suited to issues and needs at hand

Building on existing relationships to work towards developing collaborative governing strategies for OWEB FIPs, P-TA, NRCS RCPP, or other cross-jurisdictional partnerships to engage in landscape-scale restoration. Engaging key decision-makers in strategic planning processes to develop watershed priorities.

Serving as an information conduit, building professional capacity among partners, and fostering strong working relationships (e.g., supporting workshops and trainings to deliver technical information on topics).

Conclusion

This report reviewed the 20 years of investment that the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board has made in the operating capacity of watershed councils and soil and water conservation districts. Our evaluation of these grants found that they have been crucial to sustaining operations, building partnerships, and developing the capacity to strategically accomplish watershed restoration and conservation on the ground. We also found that (1) lead staff capacity and retention, (2) board composition and recruitment, and (3) strategic planning were all key influences on the health and effectiveness of these organizations. We hope that our analysis and insights help grantees, agencies, community partners, and others continue to support the important work of councils and districts.



Top left to bottom right: South Fork John Day Watershed Council (SFJDWC) Office Manager Lindsay Bullock, Coast Fork Willamette Watershed Council (CFWWC) snorkeling Mosby Creek, CFWWC R Franco Restoration Crew, SFJDWC Council Meeting Schoolhouse, North Coast Watershed Association (NCWA) Outreach, beef cattle in Malheur County, SFJDWC Phil and Kristy St. Clair (Vice Chair), SFJDWC Amy Stiner (Executive Director). Credits: districts, councils, organizations listed.

APPENDICES

for A 20-Year Review of the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board's
Capacity Investments

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Appendix 1. History of OWEB Funding Strategies.¹

Funding Strategy	Biennium	Description
Blanket Funding	1997 - 2003	<p>Evaluation Criteria Evaluated based on the scope of work and description of accomplishments. There was no consideration of biological or geographic values or priorities.</p> <p>Funding Distribution Equally distributed across OWEB regions. <i>*For the 2001 - 2003 grant cycle, two regions had an increase in the number and amount of requests. New applicants in these regions were awarded half-time support.</i></p>
Categorical Funding	2003 - 2005	<p>Funding Distribution Distributed grants based on funding categories. Each category had a pre-designated range of funds.</p>
Decision Matrix with Ranked Scoring	2005 - 2007	<p>Eligibility Criteria Council serves a unique geographic area (i.e., not within the bounds of another council OWEB grantee), the council reflects the balance of interests or actively seeking this, and the council has been designated by a local government.</p> <p>Merit Evaluation Criteria Elements included: (1) Council Organization, (2) Past Performance - Capital Projects, (3) Past Performance - Non-Capital Projects, and (4) Proposed Work Plan/Watershed Complexity. Reviewers looked for a balance between the two Past Performance elements.</p> <p>Review Process & Ranking System Review teams consisted of local and state perspectives. The review process consisted of reviewer evaluations, applicant interviews, and staff/reviewer discussions, followed by a review team assigning scores using a decision matrix to rank applicants. Applicants were ranked from significantly ineffective with limited accomplishments to highly effective with strong accomplishments.</p> <p>Funding Distribution OWEB provided funding based on a graduated point scale, using a standard formula, rather than a standard amount by category or a percentage of the funding requested by the applicant. Through this formula, the highest-scoring council received the highest base funding.</p> <p>Start of Umbrella Councils Some councils, i.e., “umbrella councils” received additional funding on top of the base award from 2005 - 2017.</p>

¹ Sources include: OWEB Board Meeting Notes from 2005 - present and OWEB 2021 - 2023 Operating Capacity Grant Guidance.

		Umbrella councils were based on (1) "support and coordination of at least 3 groups, having a coordinating council, sharing staff and a single Council Support grant", (2) "providing services to a watershed area containing three or more 4th-field hydrologic units" or (3) both.
Modified Decision Matrix with Ranked Scoring	2007 - 2015	<p>Eligibility Criteria Remains the same.</p> <p>Merit Evaluation Criteria Two categories (1) Council Organizational Structure and (2) Council Effectiveness.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Council Organizational Structure criteria included:</i> Organization Make-up and Citizen Involvement, Organization Improvement Efforts, Management of the Organization, and Fiscal Management. • <i>Council Effectiveness criteria included:</i> Leadership Role in Watershed Activities, Planning Strategically, Working Collaboratively, and Accomplishments. Applications also included a "special circumstances" section to provide context for reviewers to keep in mind while looking at the accomplishments of each council. Councils could describe staffing situations and demographic and social issues that affected their work. <p>Review Process & Ranking System Reviewers consisted of two teams with a representative from each OWEB region and two statewide representatives. After reviewers pre-scored the applications, they met for a facilitated "consensus scoring session". Following this, OWEB staff applied weighted factors that resulted in one merit score for each application. Council effectiveness and accomplishment criteria were weighted more heavily than council organizational structure criteria. Applications ranked by: Excellent, Very Good, Good, Satisfactory, and Needs Improvement.</p> <p>Funding Distribution Funding distribution remained the same, i.e., the highest-scoring council received the highest base funding. <i>*For the 2013 - 2015 biennium, councils received the same level of funding as the 2011-2013 biennium based on that biennium's review and merit category placement. The purpose of this was to support OWEB staff who were in the process of developing new Council Capacity grant rules for the 2015-2017 biennium.</i></p> <p>Umbrella Council Awards Continue Umbrella Council awards continue until 2017.</p>
Eligibility Criteria Focused	2015 - Present	<p>Due to resource-intensive staff time and council time of the previous method, OWEB adopted new Council Capacity grant rules.</p> <p>Eligibility Criteria² Includes: (1) designated as a watershed council by a local government, (2) previously received a Council Capacity grant, and serves an area that covers the same or larger area served by a council or group of councils as of 2013 with only one</p>

² https://secure.sos.state.or.us/oard/viewSingleRule.action%3BSESSIONID_OARD=_VLon9LnJiAMJjKYNJha26rZ1ggeHDYseAQO-PWCFwak9LE4AU_-!-2132861245?ruleVrsnRsn=180686

applicant per geographic area and includes a minimum population size of 500 within its designated boundaries, (3) has an adopted action plan by a council-governing body that meets OWEB requirements, (4) is a 501(c)(3) registered with Oregon, or written fiscal sponsorship agreement with a 501(c)(3), SWCD, city, county, or tribal government, (5) Council's governing body has adopted bylaws or a charter that includes: (a) a declaration that the council's mission aligns with OWEB's purpose as described in the Oregon Constitution and statutes. At a minimum, the bylaws or charter shall indicate that a primary purpose of the council is to work collaboratively with communities and landowners to develop and carry out voluntary watershed protection, restoration, enhancement, and community engagement activities; (b) the eligibility, selection process, length of service, and powers for governing body and officers; officer titles, governing body's decision-making process, minimum number or frequency of governing body meetings; (c) a statement that the council intends its governing body to include a diverse range of geographic areas and community interests in the watershed in order to engage a balance of interested and affected persons within the watershed as required by ORS 541.910(2); and (d) a process for amending bylaws or charter. If the council is a membership organization, its bylaws or charter must also include: membership eligibility, when membership meetings will occur, the decision-making role of the membership, a process to remove members or terminate members' voting rights; and (6) the Council's governing body has adopted policies/procedures that include: (a) list of geographic areas and community interests the council intends to include on its governing body in order to engage a balance of interested and affected persons within the watershed pursuant to ORS 541.910(2); (b) policy that the council operates as an open and inclusive organization, including inviting the public to council meetings, and, upon request, providing the public with records of its meetings and decisions; (c) policy that the council, or its fiscal sponsor, uses Generally Accepted Accounting Principles; and (d) policy that the council does not rely on litigation to compel regulatory enforcement as a means to implement its mission.

Merit Evaluation Criteria

Criteria include: (1) Effective Governance and Management, (2) Progress in Planning, (3) Progress in On-the-Ground Watershed Restoration, and (4) Progress in Stakeholder Engagement for Watershed Restoration Purposes.

Review Process

OWEB staff evaluate Council Capacity grant applications based on the merit criteria described above as well as their institutional knowledge of the council, including the council's project performance history. Councils are not ranked, but rather each application is considered on its own basis to determine funding amount.

Funding Distribution

Funding levels include: (1) full funding if the council meets all criteria, (2) reduced funding if the council meets some criteria, and (3) do not fund if the council's performance is inadequate. **Additionally, if two or more councils have merged, they are eligible for additional funding on top of the base capacity grant award. These grant funds are used to help organizations merge together to address board and staff development, strategic planning, and other costs to support the transition from multiple organizations to a single entity. This amount varies depending on whether 2, 3, or 4 or more organizations are merging.*

Umbrella Council Awards Continue Umbrella Council awards continue until 2017.

Appendix 2. Service Providers and Supportive Organizations.

Organization	Description
OWEB Regional Program Representatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Represents OWEB's programs with councils and other local conservation partners. ● Reviews, administers, and oversees the implementation of grants. ● Promotes cooperation, participation, and funding from federal, state, and local public agencies; citizens; and interest groups to assess watershed conditions, develop priority actions, and implement projects to enhance watershed conditions (e.g., attend council board meetings to support councils experiencing management challenges and sharing grant opportunities). ● Coordinates technical assistance with local partners, including councils, districts, landowners, and other stakeholders.
OWEB Capacity Coordinator ³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Works with the Director to improve coordination and joint investment opportunities with external funders, including other state agencies, federal agencies, private foundations, and other funders of similar conservation work. Identifies opportunities for leveraged investment; develops materials to help other funders understand OWEB's role and the types of investments the agency makes. ● Holds regular planning and coordination meetings with statewide organizations representing local organizations including, but not limited to the OACD, NOWC, OCEAN, and Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts. Works collaboratively to identify local partner problems and solutions. ● Works collaboratively with OWEB Regional Program Representatives and Grant Payment Specialist to manage, coordinate, and troubleshoot funding request process of Council Capacity grants. ● Leads coordination for Oregon Department of Agriculture to implement District Capacity program. ● Coordinates program development, assessment, and implementation with program managers, regional field staff and other agency staff. ● Develops and leads effective review teams to evaluate and makes funding recommendations for Operating Capacity grants. ● Regularly communicates with applicants and trains on the application process and materials as needed. ● Makes recommendations for other grant types that may be effective to improve local capacity.
ODA Regional Water Quality Specialists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide districts with technical assistance in implementing the agricultural water quality management program. This is achieved through districts' scope of work (SOW) by "ensuring that farmers and ranchers help achieve water quality

³ Note: OWEB no longer has this position. This work has been incorporated into OWEB's Monitoring and Reporting Program Manager role.

	<p>standards and meet the agricultural pollutant load allocations assigned by the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) in its Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs).”⁴</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reviews and approves districts’ SOW reporting and operational funds prior to districts’ receipt of payments. ● Attends district board meetings and works with funding partners to support districts in working with local partners and share grant opportunities. ● Meets monthly with the SWCD Operations Specialist to share concerns about lower-functioning districts and will sometimes ask peers of higher-functioning organizations to work with lower-functioning ones. Time spent on this can be included in a district’s capacity grant.
SWCD Operations Specialist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provides biennial regional board member trainings focused on newly elected or appointed board members on legal obligations of elected officials. ● Provides biennial regional district manager round-table trainings on a variety of topics (e.g., personnel management, ethics, public meeting laws). ● Offers individual onboarding training for new employees and board directors. ● Provides on-demand operational technical support (personnel management, legal obligations, ethics, public meeting law, etc.). ● Writes and updates a “District Guidebook” outlining legal and best management practices for operating a conservation district.
Network of Oregon Watershed Councils (NOWC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Nonprofit organization funded primarily by OWEB and membership fees, that engages in advocacy work at the state level, while also offering professional development and networking opportunities. ● NOWC Insider Webinar Series regularly features content experts who offer technical training and resources on a range of topics, including best practices for nonprofit management. ● Template Library of funding resources, sample templates, handbooks, and guides. ● Watershed Council FAQs covering meetings, contracts and bids, financials, hiring and onboarding, and community action. ● 2022 Funding Opportunities spreadsheet summarizing emerging (or enhanced) state and federal funding programs.
Oregon Conservation Education and Assistance Network (OCEAN) Connect + Conference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Hosts the annual CONNECT conference for councils and districts with opportunities for peer learning and networking. ● Offers training and certification for districts on education and outreach training through universities, professional networks, and NOAA; as well as technical training, e.g., NRCS, GIS, and river restoration; and DEI trainings and toolkits.
Oregon Association of Conservation Districts (OACD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Nonprofit association of districts that partners and converses with state agencies, legislators, and statewide conservation organizations. ● Hosts the annual OACD conference which covers topics, e.g., funding opportunities, updates from partners, water quality programs, and conservation practices.

⁴ <https://www.oregon.gov/oda/programs/naturalresources/agwq/pages/agwqplans.aspx>

Oregon Conservation Partnership (OrCP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Hosts affinity groups to increase collaboration to improve conservation across councils, districts, and land trusts. Groups focus on: estuaries and tide gates, journal club for aquatic habitat restoration, pollinators, and protection of working lands and easements.● Offers monthly webinars covering fiscal management, restoration and conservation topics, outreach, partnerships, contracting, OWEB grants, and more.
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Appendix 3. Survey

A. Methods

Development and Review

A survey was sent out online using Oregon State University’s Qualtrics survey platform to all 58 councils and all 42 districts in Oregon that receive or have received Operating Capacity grants. The first set of questions focused on employees and shared staffing arrangements. The purpose of this was to frame the sampling of councils and districts using Dr. Margerum's “Reliance Model of Collaborative Capacity”, which was developed through prior surveys of councils. This conceptual model provided a way to identify staffing models, arranging organizations into similar types. We used this to develop representative sampling for case study selection. After a discussion with key ODA staff, it was determined that this was an appropriate way to understand districts as well. Types include: (1) Board-Reliant, (2) Staff-Reliant, and (3) Partner-Reliant (Table 1).

Table 1. *Typology Classifications.*

Board-Reliant	Staff-Reliant	Partner-Reliant
Lower staff levels (< 3.0 FTE).	Higher staff levels (>= 3.0 FTE).	Varied staffing that is shared with another organization (e.g., staff, coordinator).
Staff delivers primary capacity with greater reliance on a working board.	Staff fulfills most management capacity roles.	

The second set of questions focused on the level of agreement or disagreement with statements identifying factors that build or reduce organizational capacity to obtain a consistent source of quantifiable information across council and district grantees since much of the existing data sources were inconsistent. Survey questions were informed by recurring themes from key informant interviews and discussion with the Core Project Committee.

Recruitment Process

We collected emails and phone numbers for the executive director, coordinator, or district manager, for all councils and districts using the organization’s websites for councils and the annually updated Oregon SWCD Directory for districts. The survey took place between April - May 2022. The research team contacted potential respondents three times, either via email or phone call, while the Core Project Committee promoted the survey through their networks. To ensure that only qualified individuals completed the survey, we included a screening question to verify respondents were employed by a council or district and able to answer questions about their organization's staffing and capacity.

Data Analysis

Data was downloaded, cleaned, and organized in Microsoft Excel. We did not include responses that were incomplete for applying the capacity typology or for identifying factors that built or reduced organizational capacity. To categorize grantees by the capacity typology, we asked about staffing levels over the past 12 months for the executive director, district manager, or coordinator; permanent staff; contracted staff; and temporary (e.g., seasonal) staff. We then totaled these to determine whether an organization was staff- or board-reliant. There were 3 councils and 6 districts that fell on the dividing line of board-reliant vs. staff-reliant. For those, we looked at the organization’s self-description and discussed with the research team what seemed the most

appropriate designation. For partner-reliant, we used the organization’s self-description of its relationship with other organizations, and to what extent they shared staff and/or physical location with another organization. Additionally, we asked whether board members served on another related local organization’s board and if board members or other community members (e.g., volunteers) took on essential administrative tasks. For the statements focused on organizational capacity factors, we used descriptive statistics to examine the percentage of respondents in each response category by: (1) councils and districts, (2) board, staff, and partner-reliant councils as well as districts, and (3) taxing and non-taxing districts. Additionally, the categories of “strongly agree” and “somewhat agree” were simplified into a single category “agree”. This was done for the “strongly disagree” and “somewhat disagree” categories as well. Furthermore, for the capacity typologies, we calculated the average (mean) response for each of these questions to determine if there was a statistical difference between types. For the open-ended questions, we coded them qualitatively for repeated themes to find connections with the statements on organizational capacity factors.

B. Survey Questionnaire

The following questions focus on FTE and staffing arrangements.

1. What has been your organization’s staff FTE at its highest level over the past 12 months for the following categories? (FTE = Full Time Equivalent. For example, two half-time positions = 1 FTE).
 - a. Total permanent staff FTE (NOT including contract or temporary staff)?
 - b. Total contract staff FTE?
 - c. Total temporary staff FTE (e.g., seasonal)?
 - d. Executive director, district manager, or coordinator FTE (as either employee or contractor)?
2. If your organization shares any staff with another organization(s), what is the shared staff FTE for each of the following categories?
 - a. Total permanent staff FTE (NOT including contract or temporary staff)?
 - b. Total contract staff FTE?
 - c. Total temporary staff FTE (e.g., seasonal)?
 - d. Executive director, district manager, or coordinator FTE (as either employee or contractor)?
 - e. What is the name of this organization(s)?
 - f. Is there anything else you would like to explain about how you share staff and work with this organization(s)?
3. If any of your board members serve on another related local organization’s board, which of the following do they serve on?
 - a. Soil & Water Conservation District.
 - b. Watershed Council.
 - c. Another organization that is fiscally, or otherwise important to supporting your operational capacity.
 - d. What is the name of this organization(s)?
4. Do any of your board members or other community members (e.g. volunteers) take on these tasks?
 - a. Staff administrative tasks.
 - b. Grant writing.
 - c. Strategic planning.
 - d. Other _____ (please explain).

The following questions focus on finding out what factors help keep your organization functional and healthy.

1. We’re interested in learning about how your organization operates. Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements for your organization. (Strongly Agree = 1, Somewhat Agree = 2, Neither Agree nor Disagree = 3, Somewhat Disagree = 4, Strong Disagree = 5, Unsure = unranked).

Our board members have clear position descriptions describing their roles and responsibilities.
Our board receives training on financial management, facilitation, and personnel management.
Our board takes initiative and actively engages in helping manage our organization.
We have written personnel and operational policies.
We implement our personnel and operational policies.
Our board members have term limits. <i>*Since district board members are elected, we did not ask districts to respond to this.</i>
We have succession planning for board members in our strategic plans and/or other documents.
We have succession planning for lead staff (district manager, coordinator, and/or executive director) in our strategic plans and/or other documents.
We have mentorship structures in place to introduce new coordinators/directors to the community, agency contacts, and board members to support relationship building.
Our staff has clear position descriptions describing their roles and responsibilities.
We have competitive staff salaries and benefits compared to councils, districts, or similar types of organizations.
Our organization has high retention rates for our lead staff (district manager, coordinator, and/or executive director).
Our staff receive training on key operational capacities (e.g., project management, contracting, and administrative tasks).
Our staff receive training on technical skill-building (e.g., GIS).
We have adequate equipment/ technology for virtual meetings.

2. We’re interested in learning about how your organization operates with other councils, districts, or other local partners. Please rate how often your organization works with other organizations based on the following statements. (Most of the time = 1, Some of the time = 2, Seldom = 3, Never = 4, Unsure = unranked).

We are working with councils, districts, and/or other local partners.
We share office space and other administrative costs with councils, districts, or other local partners.
We share staff expertise between councils, districts, or other local partners (e.g., technical, GIS, outreach to landowners, farmers, etc.).

We actively seek out opportunities to leverage OWEB Operating Capacity grants to acquire stakeholder engagement, monitoring, technical assistance, and restoration grants to implement projects on the ground.

We actively seek out opportunities to leverage OWEB Operating Capacity grants to build cooperative partnerships with councils, districts, or other local organizations.

We actively seek out opportunities to leverage OWEB Operating Capacity grants to obtain additional funding for capacity building (e.g., hiring additional staff, providing staff skills training, and improving administrative management).

3. (Optional): Please explain anything important that has helped keep your organization healthy and functional.
4. (Optional): What has been your most significant challenge for sustaining the work of your council/district?

C. Statistical Analysis

Table 2. Statistical Analysis of Council Survey Results.

Council Responses	Staff-reliant	Board-reliant	Partner-reliant	All
	N=27	N=17	N=3	
Clear Board Position Descriptions	1.78	2.18	2.67	1.98
Board Training	3.00	3.00	3.67	3.04
Board Initiative*	2.22†	2.06¥	3.33†¥	2.23
Written Policies¥	1.19*	1.47*	1.33	1.30
Implement Policies	1.41	1.65	1.33	1.49
Board Term Limits	2.74	3.06	2.67	2.85
Board Succession Planning	3.30	3.29	3.67	3.32
Lead Staff Succession Planning	3.70	3.41	4.33	3.64
New Lead Staff Mentorship	3.22	3.13	2.33	3.13
Clear Staff Position Descriptions	1.52*†	2.12*¥	1.00†¥	1.70
Competitive salaries	2.44*	3.07*	2.33	2.64
Lead Staff High Retention Rates*	1.93†	2.53¥	1.00†¥	2.09
Training–Operational Capacities	2.22	2.50	3.00	2.37
Training–Technical Skills	2.44	3.06	3.33	2.72
Virtual Meeting Equipment	1.93*	2.69*¥	2.00¥	2.20
Work with Councils, Districts, Others	1.15*	1.41*	1.33	1.26
Share Office Space	3.19†	2.88¥	1.00†¥	2.94
Share Staff Expertise	1.56	1.88	1.33	1.66
Acquire OWEB Grants for Implementation	1.33	1.69¥	1.00¥	1.43
Build Cooperative Partnerships	1.48†	1.69	2.00†	1.59
Additional Funding for Capacity Building	1.67	1.94	1.67	1.76

* statistically significant difference between Staff-reliant and Board-reliant Councils

† statistically significant difference between Staff-reliant and Partner-reliant Councils

¥ statistically significant difference between Board-reliant and Partner-reliant Councils

Table 3. Statistical Analysis of District Survey Results.

District Responses	Staff-reliant	Board-reliant	Partner-reliant	All
	N=28	N=5	N=5	N=38
Clear Board Position Descriptions	2.00	2.40	2.20	2.08
Board Training	2.82	2.60	2.60	2.76
Board Initiative	2.21	2.60	2.40	2.29
Written Policies	1.32	1.80	1.40	1.39
Implement Policies	1.29	2.00	1.20	1.37
Board Succession Planning	3.38	3.40	3.40	3.39
Lead Staff Succession Planning	3.00	3.40	3.40	3.11
New Lead Staff Mentorship	3.36	3.20	3.00	3.29
Clear Staff Position Descriptions	1.32	2.40	1.40	1.47
Competitive salaries	1.89*†	4.40*	3.00†	2.37
Lead Staff High Retention Rates	2.04	1.80	1.80	1.97
Training—Operational Capacities	1.93	2.40	2.00	2.00
Training—Technical Skills	1.79	2.20	2.20	1.89
Virtual Meeting Equipment	2.04	2.60	2.00	2.11
Work with Councils, Districts, Others	1.04	1.40	1.20	1.11
Share Office Space	1.79*	2.80*	1.60	1.89
Share Staff Expertise	1.25*	1.80*	1.80	1.39
Acquire OWEB Grants for Implementation	1.19	1.60	1.20	1.24
Build Cooperative Partnerships	1.54	1.80	1.40	1.55
Additional Funding for Capacity Building	1.54	1.80	2.00	1.63

* statistically significant difference between Staff-reliant and Board-reliant Districts

† statistically significant difference between Staff-reliant and Partner-reliant Districts

D. Council Databases

Table 4. Capacity Building Factors by Councils.

		Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Unsure
Clear Board Position Descriptions	Percent	40%	38%	9%	9%	4%	0%
	Number	19	18	4	4	2	0
Board Training	Percent	9%	36%	13%	28%	15%	0%
	Number	4	17	6	13	7	0
Board Initiative	Percent	26%	45%	13%	15%	2%	0%
	Number	12	21	6	7	1	0
Written Policies	Percent	72%	26%	2%	0%	0%	0%
	Number	34	12	1	0	0	0
Implemented Policies	Percent	70%	19%	4%	4%	2%	0%
	Number	33	9	2	2	1	0
Board Term Limits	Percent	32%	17%	15%	6%	30%	0%
	Number	15	8	7	3	14	0
Board Succession Planning	Percent	11%	19%	21%	26%	23%	0%
	Number	5	9	10	12	11	0
Lead Staff Succession Planning	Percent	11%	6%	26%	23%	34%	0%
	Number	5	3	12	11	16	0
New Lead Staff Mentorship	Percent	11%	21%	32%	13%	21%	2%
	Number	5	10	15	6	10	1
Clear Staff Position Descriptions	Percent	53%	30%	11%	6%	0%	0%
	Number	25	14	5	3	0	0

Competitive Salaries	Percent	21%	26%	21%	21%	6%	4%
	Number	10	12	10	10	3	2
Lead Staff High Retention Rates	Percent	49%	19%	15%	9%	9%	0%
	Number						
Training – Operational Capacities	Number	10	20	7	7	2	1
	Percent						
Training – Technical Skills	Percent	13%	45%	15%	17%	6%	4%
	Number	6	21	7	8	3	2
Virtual Meeting Equipment	Percent	34%	36%	13%	4%	11%	2%
	Number	16	17	6	2	5	1

Table 5. Councils: Working with Local Partners and Leveraging Capacity Grants.

		Most of the time	Some of the time	Seldom	Never	Unsure
Work with Councils, Districts, Other Local Partners	Percent	74%	26%	0%	0%	0%
	Number	35	12	0	0	0
Share Office Space	Percent	21%	11%	21%	47%	0%
	Number	10	5	10	22	0
Share Staff Expertise	Percent	45%	49%	2%	4%	0%
	Number	21	23	1	2	0
Acquire OWEB Grants for Implementation	Percent	68%	23%	0%	6%	2%
	Number	32	11	0	3	1
Build Cooperative Partnerships	Percent	68%	11%	11%	9%	2%
	Number	32	5	5	4	1
Additional Funding for Capacity Building	Percent	43%	43%	6%	6%	2%
	Number	20	20	3	3	1

Table 6. Capacity Building Factors by Council Typology. (Note: B-R = Board-Reliant, S-R = Staff-Reliant, P-R = Partner-Reliant).

		Strongly Agree		Somewhat Agree		Neither Agree nor Disagree		Somewhat Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Unsure	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Clear Board Position Descriptions	B-R	7	41%	4	24%	3	18%	2	12%	1	6%	0	0%
	S-R	11	41%	13	48%	1	4%	2	7%	0	0%	0	0%
	P-R	1	33%	1	33%	0	0%	0	0%	1	33%	0	0%
Board Training	B-R	2	12%	5	29%	3	18%	5	29%	2	12%	0	0%
	S-R	2	7%	11	41%	3	11%	7	26%	4	15%	0	0%
	P-R	0	0%	1	33%	0	0%	1	33%	1	33%	0	0%
Board Initiative	B-R	5	29%	8	47%	2	12%	2	12%	0	0%	0	0%
	S-R	7	26%	12	44%	4	15%	3	11%	1	4%	0	0%
	P-R	0	0%	1	33%	0	0%	2	67%	0	0%	0	0%
Written Policies	B-R	10	59%	6	35%	1	6%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
	S-R	22	81%	5	19%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
	P-R	2	67%	1	33%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Implemented Policies	B-R	10	59%	4	24%	2	12%	1	6%	0	0%	0	0%
	S-R	21	78%	4	15%	0	0%	1	4%	1	4%	0	0%
	P-R	2	67%	1	33%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Board Term Limits	B-R	3	18%	3	18%	5	29%	2	12%	4	24%	0	0%
	S-R	11	41%	4	15%	2	7%	1	4%	9	33%	0	0%
	P-R	1	33%	1	33%	0	0%	0	0%	1	33%	0	0%
	B-R	3	18%	1	6%	6	35%	2	12%	5	29%	0	0%

Board Succession Planning	S-R	2	7%	7	26%	4	15%	9	33%	5	19%	0	0%
	P-R	0	0%	1	33%	0	0%	1	33%	1	33%	0	0%
Lead Staff Succession Planning	B-R	3	18%	0	0%	6	35%	3	18%	5	29%	0	0%
	S-R	2	7%	3	11%	6	22%	6	22%	10	37%	0	0%
	P-R	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	2	67%	1	33%	0	0%
New Lead Staff Mentorship	B-R	2	12%	2	12%	6	35%	4	24%	2	12%	1	6%
	S-R	1	4%	8	30%	9	33%	2	7%	7	26%	0	0%
	P-R	2	67%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	33%	0	0%
Clear Staff Position Descriptions	B-R	6	35%	6	35%	2	12%	3	18%	0	0%	0	0%
	S-R	16	59%	8	30%	3	11%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
	P-R	3	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Competitive Salaries	B-R	2	12%	4	24%	3	18%	3	18%	3	18%	2	12%
	S-R	7	26%	7	26%	7	26%	6	22%	0	0%	0	0%
	P-R	1	33%	1	33%	0	0%	1	33%	0	0%	0	0%
Lead Staff High Retention Rates	B-R	7	41%	2	12%	3	18%	2	12%	3	18%	0	0%
	S-R	13	48%	7	26%	4	15%	2	7%	1	4%	0	0%
	P-R	3	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Training – Operational Capacities	B-R	4	24%	6	35%	1	6%	4	24%	1	6%	1	6%
	S-R	6	22%	12	44%	6	22%	3	11%	0	0%	0	0%
	P-R	0	0%	2	67%	0	0%	0	0%	1	33%	0	0%
	B-R	3	18%	6	35%	1	6%	3	18%	2	12%	2	12%

Training – Technical Skills	S-R	3	11%	14	52%	5	19%	5	19%	0	0%	0	0%
	P-R	0	0%	1	33%	1	33%	0	0%	1	33%	0	0%
Virtual Meeting Equipment	B-R	4	24%	4	24%	4	24%	1	6%	3	18%	1	6%
	S-R	12	44%	10	37%	2	7%	1	4%	2	7%	0	0%
	P-R	0	0%	3	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%

Table 7. Council Typology: Working with Local Partners and Leveraging Operating Capacity Grants.(Note: B-R = Board-Reliant, S-R = Staff-Reliant, P-R = Partner-Reliant).

		Most of the time		Some of the time		Seldom		Never		Unsure	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Work with Councils, Districts, Other Local Partners	B-R	10	59%	7	41%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
	S-R	23	85%	4	15%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
	P-R	2	67%	1	33%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Share Office Space	B-R	2	12%	5	29%	3	18%	7	41%	0	0%
	S-R	5	19%	0	0%	7	26%	15	56%	0	0%
	P-R	3	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Share Staff Expertise	B-R	5	29%	10	59%	1	6%	1	6%	0	0%
	S-R	14	52%	12	44%	0	0%	1	4%	0	0%
	P-R	2	67%	1	33%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Acquire OWEB Grants for Implementation	B-R	11	65%	2	12%	0	0%	3	18%	1	6%
	S-R	18	67%	9	33%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
	P-R	3	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Build Cooperative	B-R	12	71%	0	0%	1	6%	3	18%	1	6%

Partnerships	S-R	19	70%	4	15%	3	11%	1	4%	0	0%
	P-R	1	33%	1	33%	1	33%	0	0%	0	0%
Additional Funding for Capacity Building	B-R	7	41%	5	29%	2	12%	2	12%	1	6%
	S-R	12	44%	13	48%	1	4%	1	4%	0	0%
	P-R	1	33%	2	67%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%

E. District Databases

Table 8. Capacity Building Factors by Districts.

		Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Unsure
Clear Board Position Descriptions	Percent	42%	34%	5%	11%	8%	0%
	Number	16	13	2	4	3	0
Board Training	Percent	11%	39%	21%	21%	8%	0%
	Number	4	15	8	8	3	0
Board Initiative	Percent	34%	32%	5%	29%	0%	0%
	Number	13	12	2	11	0	0
Written Policies	Percent	71%	24%	3%	0%	3%	0%
	Number	27	9	1	0	1	0
Implemented Policies	Percent	71%	26%	0%	0%	3%	0%
	Number	27	10	0	0	1	0
Board Succession Planning	Percent	11%	13%	24%	24%	24%	5%
	Number	4	5	9	9	9	2
Lead Staff Succession Planning	Percent	13%	24%	16%	24%	18%	5%

	Number	5	9	6	9	7	2
New Lead Staff Mentorship	Percent	11%	26%	16%	18%	29%	0%
	Number	4	10	6	7	11	0
Clear Staff Position Descriptions	Percent	68%	21%	8%	0%	3%	0%
	Number	26	8	3	0	1	0
Competitive Salaries	Percent	39%	24%	13%	8%	16%	0%
	Number	15	9	5	3	6	0
Lead Staff High Retention Rates	Percent	55%	21%	3%	13%	8%	0%
	Number	21	8	1	5	3	0
Training – Operational Capacities	Percent	47%	24%	16%	8%	5%	0%
	Number	18	9	6	3	2	0
Training – Technical Skills	Percent	47%	34%	8%	3%	8%	0%
	Number	18	13	3	1	3	0
Virtual Meeting Equipment	Percent	45%	29%	8%	8%	11%	0%
	Number	17	11	3	3	4	0

Table 9. Districts: Working with Local Partners and Leveraging Operating Capacity Grants.

		Most of the time	Some of the time	Seldom	Never	Unsure
Work with Councils, Districts, Other Local Partners	Percent	92%	5%	3%	0%	0%
	Number	35	2	1	0	0
Share Office Space	Percent	58%	16%	5%	21%	0%
	Number	22	6	2	8	0
Share Staff Expertise	Percent	74%	16%	8%	3%	0%

	Number	28	6	3	1	0
Acquire OWEB Grants for Implementation	Percent	82%	11%	3%	3%	3%
	Number	31	4	1	1	1
Build Cooperative Partnerships	Percent	63%	24%	8%	5%	0%
	Number	24	9	3	2	0
Additional Funding for Capacity Building	Percent	63%	18%	11%	8%	0%
	Number	24	7	4	3	0

Table 10. Capacity Building Factors by District Typology. (Note: B-R = Board-Reliant, S-R = Staff-Reliant, P-R = Partner-Reliant).

		Strongly Agree		Somewhat Agree		Neither Agree nor Disagree		Somewhat Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Unsure	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Clear Board Position Descriptions	B-R	0	0%	4	80%	0	0%	1	20%	0	0%	0	0%
	S-R	13	46%	9	32%	1	4%	3	11%	2	7%	0	0%
	P-R	3	60%	0	0%	1	20%	0	0%	1	20%	0	0%
Board Training	B-R	0	0%	3	60%	1	20%	1	20%	0	0%	0	0%
	S-R	3	11%	10	36%	7	25%	5	18%	3	11%	0	0%
	P-R	1	20%	2	40%	0	0%	2	40%	0	0%	0	0%
Board Initiative	B-R	1	20%	1	20%	2	40%	1	20%	0	0%	0	0%
	S-R	10	36%	10	36%	0	0%	8	29%	0	0%	0	0%
	P-R	2	40%	1	20%	0	0%	2	40%	0	0%	0	0%
Written Policies	B-R	2	40%	2	40%	1	20%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
	S-R	22	79%	5	18%	0	0%	0	0%	1	4%	0	0%
	P-R	3	60%	2	40%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%

Implemented Policies	B-R	3	60%	1	20%	0	0%	0	0%	1	20%	0	0%
	S-R	20	71%	8	29%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
	P-R	4	80%	1	20%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Board Succession Planning	B-R	0	0%	1	20%	2	40%	1	20%	1	20%	0	0%
	S-R	3	11%	3	11%	7	25%	7	25%	6	21%	2	7%
	P-R	1	20%	1	20%	0	0%	1	20%	2	40%	0	0%
Lead Staff Succession Planning	B-R	0	0%	2	40%	1	20%	0	0%	2	40%	0	0%
	S-R	4	14%	6	21%	5	18%	8	29%	3	11%	2	7%
	P-R	1	20%	1	20%	0	0%	1	20%	2	40%	0	0%
New Lead Staff Mentorship	B-R	1	20%	1	20%	1	20%	0	0%	2	40%	0	0%
	S-R	1	4%	9	32%	5	18%	5	18%	8	29%	0	0%
	P-R	2	40%	0	0%	0	0%	2	40%	1	20%	0	0%
Clear Staff Position Descriptions	B-R	2	40%	1	20%	1	20%	0	0%	1	20%	0	0%
	S-R	21	75%	5	18%	2	7%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
	P-R	3	60%	2	40%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Competitive Salaries	B-R	0	0%	1	20%	0	0%	0	0%	4	80%	0	0%
	S-R	15	54%	6	21%	3	11%	3	11%	1	4%	0	0%
	P-R	0	0%	2	40%	2	40%	0	0%	1	20%	0	0%
Lead Staff High Retention Rates	B-R	4	80%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	20%	0	0%
	S-R	14	50%	7	25%	1	4%	4	14%	2	7%	0	0%
	P-R	3	60%	1	20%	0	0%	1	20%	0	0%	0	0%
	B-R	2	40%	1	20%	1	20%	0	0%	1	20%	0	0%

Training – Operational Capacities	S-R	15	54%	5	18%	4	14%	3	11%	1	4%	0	0%
	P-R	1	20%	3	60%	1	20%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Training – Technical Skills	B-R	2	40%	2	40%	0	0%	0	0%	1	20%	0	0%
	S-R	15	54%	9	32%	1	4%	1	4%	2	7%	0	0%
	P-R	1	20%	2	40%	2	40%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Virtual Meeting Equipment	B-R	3	60%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	2	40%	0	0%
	S-R	11	39%	11	39%	2	7%	2	7%	2	7%	0	0%
	P-R	3	60%	0	0%	1	20%	1	20%	0	0%	0	0%

Table 11. District Typology: Working with Local Partners and Leveraging Operating Capacity Grants. (Note: B-R = Board-Reliant, S-R = Staff-Reliant, P-R = Partner-Reliant).

		Most of the time		Some of the time		Seldom		Never		Unsure	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Work with Councils, Districts, Other Local Partners	B-R	4	80%	0	0%	1	20%	0	0%	0	0%
	S-R	27	96%	1	4%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
	P-R	4	80%	1	20%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Share Office Space	B-R	1	20%	1	20%	1	20%	2	40%	0	0%
	S-R	18	64%	4	14%	0	0%	6	21%	0	0%
	P-R	3	60%	1	20%	1	20%	0	0%	0	0%
Share Staff Expertise	B-R	2	40%	2	40%	1	20%	0	0%	0	0%
	S-R	23	82%	3	11%	2	7%	0	0%	0	0%
	P-R	3	60%	1	20%	0	0%	1	20%	0	0%
Acquire OWEB Grants for	B-R	4	80%	0	0%	0	0%	1	20%	0	0%
	S-R	23	82%	3	11%	1	4%	0	0%	1	4%

Implementation	P-R	4	80%	1	20%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Build Cooperative Partnerships	B-R	3	60%	1	20%	0	0%	1	20%	0	0%
	S-R	17	61%	8	29%	2	7%	1	4%	0	0%
	P-R	4	80%	0	0%	1	20%	0	0%	0	0%
Additional Funding for Capacity Building	B-R	3	60%	1	20%	0	0%	1	20%	0	0%
	S-R	18	64%	6	21%	3	11%	1	4%	0	0%
	P-R	3	60%	0	0%	1	20%	1	20%	0	0%

Table 12. Capacity Building Factors by Taxing vs. Non-Taxing Districts.

		Strongly Agree		Somewhat Agree		Neither Agree nor Disagree		Somewhat Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Unsure	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Clear Board Position Descriptions	Taxing	4	40%	2	20%	1	10%	2	20%	1	10%	0	0%
	Non-Taxing	9	50%	7	39%	0	0%	1	6%	1	6%	0	0%
Board Training	Taxing	1	10%	3	30%	3	30%	1	10%	2	20%	0	0%
	Non-Taxing	2	11%	7	39%	4	22%	4	22%	1	6%	0	0%
Board Initiative	Taxing	2	20%	5	50%	0	0%	3	30%	0	0%	0	0%
	Non-Taxing	8	44%	5	28%	0	0%	5	28%	0	0%	0	0%
Written Policies	Taxing	8	80%	2	20%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
	Non-Taxing	14	78%	3	17%	0	0%	0	0%	1	6%	0	0%
Implemented Policies	Taxing	7	70%	3	30%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
	Non-Taxing	13	72%	5	28%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
	Taxing	1	10%	1	10%	2	20%	2	20%	3	30%	1	10%

Board Succession Planning	Non-Taxing	2	11%	2	11%	5	28%	5	28%	3	17%	1	6%
Lead Staff Succession Planning	Taxing	2	20%	3	30%	1	10%	1	10%	2	20%	1	10%
	Non-Taxing	2	11%	3	17%	4	22%	7	39%	1	6%	1	6%
New Lead Staff Mentorship	Taxing	1	10%	0	0%	2	20%	3	30%	4	40%	0	0%
	Non-Taxing	0	0%	9	50%	3	17%	2	11%	4	22%	0	0%
Clear Staff Position Descriptions	Taxing	8	80%	1	10%	1	10%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
	Non-Taxing	13	72%	4	22%	1	6%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Competitive Salaries	Taxing	7	70%	2	20%	1	10%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
	Non-Taxing	8	44%	4	22%	2	11%	3	17%	1	6%	0	0%
Lead Staff High Retention Rates	Taxing	6	60%	1	10%	0	0%	3	30%	0	0%	0	0%
	Non-Taxing	8	44%	6	33%	1	6%	1	6%	2	11%	0	0%
Training–Operational Capacities	Taxing	7	70%	1	10%	0	0%	1	10%	1	10%	0	0%
	Non-Taxing	8	44%	4	22%	4	22%	2	11%	0	0%	0	0%
Training–Technical Skills	Taxing	6	60%	3	30%	0	0%	0	0%	1	10%	0	0%
	Non-Taxing	9	50%	6	33%	1	6%	1	6%	1	6%	0	0%
Virtual Meeting Equipment	Taxing	7	70%	2	20%	1	10%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
	Non-Taxing	4	22%	9	50%	1	6%	2	11%	2	11%	0	0%

Table 13. Taxing vs. Non-Taxing Districts: Working with Local Partners and Leveraging Operating Capacity Grants.

		Most of the time		Some of the time		Seldom		Never		Unsure	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Work with Councils, Districts, Other Local	Taxing	10	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
	Non-Taxing	17	94%	1	6%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%

Partners											
Share Office Space	Taxing	7	70%	1	10%	0	0%	2	20%	0	0%
	Non-Taxing	11	61%	3	17%	0	0%	4	22%	0	0%
Share Staff Expertise	Taxing	8	80%	2	20%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
	Non-Taxing	15	83%	1	6%	2	11%	0	0%	0	0%
Acquire OWEB Grants for Implementation	Taxing	8	80%	2	20%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
	Non-Taxing	15	83%	1	6%	1	6%	0	0%	1	6%
Build Cooperative Partnerships	Taxing	5	50%	4	40%	1	10%	0	0%	0	0%
	Non-Taxing	12	67%	4	22%	1	6%	1	6%	0	0%
Additional Funding for Capacity Building	Taxing	6	60%	2	20%	2	20%	0	0%	0	0%
	Non-Taxing	12	67%	4	22%	1	6%	1	6%	0	0%

Appendix 4. Case Studies

A. Methods

Case Study Selection

For the organizations that responded to the survey, we crosswalked the capacity typology with Oregon Watershed Restoration Inventory (OWRI)⁵ and OWEB Grant Management System (OGMS)⁶ data, from 1997 to 2019, to identify grantees with lower, low to medium, medium to high, and higher levels of obtaining and leveraging resources. To define these, we added up the total cash spent and in-kind contributions for each organization and then used quartile statistical breakpoints. We compared councils to councils and districts to districts, since each differed in their organizational structure, and as such, were distinct units of measure. We also accounted for organizations' name changes to ensure we included their entire history of funding obtained. We also noted which districts received local taxes. The only districts with a tax base fell under the staff-reliant typology, which validated the data based on the working assumption that once a district obtained a tax base, they were able to operate at a higher level because of increased staffing.

Initial Document Analysis

We sampled 20 organizations, (i.e., 10 councils and 10 districts; see Table 14), using selection criteria in the following order: representative across typologies, a representative proportion of resources obtained and leveraged, and representative across urban and rural. Lastly, we consulted with the Core Project Committee to identify which of these organizations would be more likely and able to participate. For each of the selected 20 organizations, we reviewed available data from OGMS grant documents⁷ and OWRI data from 1997 to 2019, as well as SOW and FAAP from 2015 to 2019, OWEB FIPs and P-TA, and other organizational documents accessible on council and district websites to create in-depth organizational profiles. These profiles summarized the history and trajectory of each organization relative to the following capacity dimensions:

- Internal governance and operational practices (e.g., organizational documents, changes in staffing and board over time, changes in organizational structure and processes)
- Adaptive governance (e.g., mention of succession planning in organizational documents)
- Resources obtained and leveraged (e.g., funding sources used most frequently, acquisition of regionally competitive funds)
- Types of partners engaged (e.g., landowners, public agencies, private, nonprofit, and research entities worked with most frequently)
- Partnership types engaged in (e.g., involvement in OWEB FIPs and P-TA, NRCS RCPP, and cross-boundary partnerships)

⁵ OWRI included projects voluntarily reported that may or may not have received OWEB restoration grants. However, the purpose of this data source was to determine how many resources grantees obtained overall. Furthermore, despite the voluntary nature of reporting, this data source contained a fairly comprehensive listing of councils and districts self-reporting from 1997 to 2019.

⁶ OGMS data included OWEB grants for technical assistance, monitoring, education, outreach, and stakeholder engagement from 1997 to 2019. Since the initiation of OWEB's restoration grants, grantees have been required to report receipt of these to OWRI. Therefore, we did not include restoration grants to avoid duplication.

⁷ OGMS grant documents included council support, restoration, technical assistance, monitoring, education, outreach, and stakeholder engagement from 1997 to 2019. For districts that served as fiscal sponsors to a council, we also looked at council support grant documents for councils to better understand how they work together.

Table 14. Grantees Selected for Initial Document Analysis.

Councils	Districts
Coast Fork Willamette WC	Clackamas SWCD
Malheur WC	Clatsop SWCD
Nestucca - Neskowin WC	Crook SWCD
North Coast WA	Curry SWCD
Powder Basin WC	Douglas SWCD
Rogue River WC	Grant SWCD
South Fork John Day WC	Marion SWCD
Tualatin River WC	Siuslaw SWCD
Upper Deschutes WC	Wallowa SWCD
Walla Walla WC	Wheeler SWCD

In-depth Interviews

To select case study organizations for in-depth interviews, we developed a spreadsheet of the sampled 20 organizations, noting highlights from each capacity dimension to identify organizations that seemed likely to offer insights into these topics based on their specific experiences. Additionally, we ensured that the organizations we selected were roughly representative of a diversity of types and locations as per our selection criteria for the initial document analysis. Lastly, we considered which councils and districts were involved in the FIP Partnership Learning Project to not over-burden potential participants in a simultaneous research study. We selected 7 organizations for case study interviews in consultation with the Core Project Committee (Table 15). Interview questions were informed by the in-depth organizational profiles and discussion with the Core Project Committee. Prior to conducting interviews, we shared the organizational profile we developed with lead staff (e.g., coordinator, executive director, or district manager) for validation. Interviews were semi-structured and questions were slightly adjusted in the course of the interview based on what organization they worked for, as well as based on the expertise and role of the interviewee. Interviewees included: current and past lead staff (i.e., executive directors, coordinators, district managers), 1 to 2 other staff (e.g. project managers, administrative assistants), 1 to 2 board members (e.g., board chair/president or vice chair/vice president), and 2 to 3 top partnering organizations.⁸

⁸ It was difficult to contact previous staff or board members for interviews since they were less available to participate, while some organizations were not sure of who past staff were. Interestingly, some organizations have relied on past staff during times of staffing transitions, which increased the likelihood of their participation. Additionally, when it was not possible to obtain partner contacts of a council or districts' top partnering organization because they were going through their own lead staff transition, we interviewed the organizations who were available to participate.

Table 15. Grantees Selected for In-depth Interviews.

Organizations	Number of Interviews
Coast Fork Willamette WC	7
North Coast WA	5
Powder Basin WC	6
South Fork John Day WC	7
Curry SWCD	7
Marion SWCD	6
Wheeler SWCD	4
TOTAL	42

Interview Analysis

Interviews were recorded on Zoom or by hand-held recorder for phone interviews, and transcribed using Rev transcription service. For individuals that preferred to not be recorded, we took detailed notes. Data collected during the interviews was linked only to participant names by password-protected key sheets kept on the researchers’ institutional computers and password-protected cloud file sharing. Using NVivo qualitative analysis software, we analyzed the interviews by using themes related to the capacity dimensions, as well as by how grantees’ used the Operating Capacity grants to identify what built or reduced organizational capacity (Table 16). Additionally, we triangulated this data with the key informant interviews that took place in 2020 with OWEB Regional Program Representatives and ODA Regional Water Quality Specialists, as well as the organizational profiles we developed in the initial document analysis, to validate findings from the case study interviews. Lastly, we discussed the findings with the Core Project Committee to verify what we found with their institutional knowledge and long history of working with councils and districts.

Table 16. Primary NVivo Codes.

Primary Codes	Description
Operating Capacity Grant Program	How organizations used the Operating Capacity grants, comments on the role of OWEB/ODA staff in supporting organizations, and comments about grant application or reporting requirements.
Governance	Organizational management and challenges (e.g., roles and relationships between board and lead staff, fiscal management, succession planning), strategic plans, board recruitment, staff and board transitions, and on-boarding and training for staff and board.
Partnerships	How organizations build relationships to develop partnerships with agencies, tribes, councils, districts, or other local partners to work on joint projects; sharing staff or technical skills or knowledge with these entities; involvement in OWEB FIPs, P-TA grants or NRCS' RCPP grants; and participation in regional coordination and other information-sharing groups.
Resources	Discussion of how OWEB grants have helped organizations acquire non-OWEB funding sources; how they learned about these funding sources; participation in group networks to learn about and coordinate funding; access to stable funding; geographic and other differences in funding opportunities.
Interviewee Role	Position's title and length of employment; daily tasks and level of oversight with board and staff; and past work or volunteer experiences with councils, districts, or other jobs that led them to this position.

B. Case Study Interview Guide

Introductory Question

1. What's your role in your organization? How long have you been in this position?

Operating Capacity Grant Program

For this section, we want to hear your thoughts on how to improve OWEB's Operating Capacity grant program.

2. Is there anything about the Operating Capacity grant program that you think needs to change to be more supportive of your organization?
3. Are there aspects of the Operating Capacity grant program that help or hinder your ability to build more capacity?

Internal Governance & Operational Practices

For this section, we're hoping to learn more about how your organization functions, how it has evolved over time, and what factors have contributed to your organization's resilience.

4. We have some questions about the role and culture of your board.
 - a. Is your board more of a working board or a strategic board?
 - b. How engaged is your board in the management of the council?
 - c. Have you used onboarding or continuing education processes for your board?
 - i. *PROMPT:* e.g., orientation, position descriptions, division of duties?
 - d. What challenges have you had in board recruitment? What strategies have you used to overcome these?
5. *Plan to reference organizational profile:* Do you have a strategic action plan? How are you using it to build your organizational capacity? To sustain and build partnerships?
6. Can you tell me about a time when your organization faced challenges and you were able to respond to these challenges effectively?
 - a. *PROMPT:* What helped make that response effective? Leadership, partners, staff?
7. Can you tell me about a time when you faced difficulties that your organization had difficulty responding to or recovering from?
 - a. *PROMPT:* What made the response challenging? Capacity, board, partners, staff?
8. Has your council/district faced any challenging staffing or board changes?
 - a. *Follow-Up:* Were these expected or unexpected changes?
 - b. *Follow-Up:* Were these individuals key players in running the organization and/or had they been a part of the organization for a long time?
 - c. *Follow-Up:* How did your organization navigate staffing/board transitions?
9. What kinds of strategies, resources, or guidance do you have for succession planning?
 - a. *PROMPT - IF PARTNER-RELIANT:* I've heard of some organizations that work with a district or other entity as a fiscal sponsor will sometimes share staff. Does your organization do this? If so, do you have this written up in your organizational documents, or is this more informal, based on when the need arises?

Partnerships

For this section, we're hoping to learn more about how your organization partners with other organizations to build capacity in terms of skills, knowledge, and leveraging financial resources. We're also interested in learning about the types of partners you engage with on projects.

10. How do you partner with neighboring councils and/or districts to share services to meet skill and/or knowledge gaps to build capacity?
 - a. *PROMPT:* For example, working with a district that has an engineer on staff and can share technical assistance, while council staff focuses on outreach or education?
11. Who are the top 3 organizations that are your most important partners? How familiar are they with how your organization functions? (*We're planning to reach out to interview these organizations to help us learn more about how your organization operates. This will give us additional insight into what builds or reduces capacity.*)
 - a. *Follow-Up:* How did those partnerships develop?
12. Have you lost any partnerships recently?
 - a. *Follow-Up:* Do you know why it ended?
13. *If they received an OWEB FIP or P-TA grant:* How has the use of Partnership TA or FIP grants assisted your organization in building partnerships?
 - a. *PROMPT:* Based on looking through the OGMS grant applications, it seems like you had already built relationships with partners through past work together. Did anything change through the act of developing organizational documents and/or strategic action plans for P-TA grants? Did these working relationships become more intentional or was it just writing down what you were already practicing?

Resources Obtained & Leveraged

For this section, we're hoping to learn more about how your organization has leveraged funding from other sources and what challenges you've faced in acquiring those resources. We are also interested in understanding how your relationships with other organizations affect your ability to obtain funding.

14. Can you discuss how your non-OWEB funding sources have been developed and maintained?
 - a. *PROMPT:* Was it personal relationships with others, networking, or informal information sharing?
 - b. *PROMPT:* Has this been through staff outreach? Board connections?
15. How have OWEB Operating Capacity grants helped to leverage these other resources?
16. What kinds of ecological or regionally specific funds has your council/district received (e.g., BEF, BPA, NOAA, Meyer Memorial Trust, stewardship contracting from national forests)?
 - a. *Follow-Up:* What do you think has led to your success in capturing those grants?

Closing

17. Is there anything I didn't ask you about that you think is important to this discussion?

C. Key Informant Interview Guide

1. I'd like to start by knowing about the major or most common trends in the top priorities that councils/districts deal with in your area and how this has changed over time. Can you tell me about some of the key characteristics/what is unique in your region?
2. Can you identify two or three "types" of councils/districts in your region in terms of staff size, stability, etc.?
3. What are the different needs and challenges that each "type" is confronting? How do you think they would best be supported?
 - a. How do the necessary types and combinations of capacity for a council seem to vary depending on the organizational development stage, staff size, local partnership ecology, and their primary focus?

- b. If needed as another way to get them to talk about this: Walk through a story of a “high functioning” anonymous council/district in your area. How and why is it high functioning?
 - c. If needed: Walk through a story of a “low functioning” anonymous council/district in your area. How and why is it low functioning?
- 4. What are the differences, if any, in the challenges and opportunities faced by municipal corporations (districts), nonprofits, other non-government structures (councils), or hybrid council/district organizations in your region?
- 5. Are there any specific ways you have seen capacity funding used in your region that have improved organizational and partnership capacity?
- 6. Are there any specific ways you wish you saw capacity funding being used in your region?
- 7. Can you think of any possible ways that OWEB could track and share quantitative and qualitative capacity measures to better support councils and districts in your area in overcoming capacity challenges?
- 8. What intangible or difficult-to-quantify impacts do you think that OWEB Operating Capacity grants have had on organizations that have received them?
- 9. Have you seen that receiving OWEB funding has led to any unintended negative consequences for recipient groups? If so, what are they?
- 10. Knowing that your answers will be confidential, do you have any positive or negative feedback for OWEB/ODA about their work to support councils and districts? What changes would you recommend that they make to their programs?

D. Database of Case Study Organizations

The following table is a summary of the organizational background information we collected for each of the organizations selected for in-depth interviews. The purpose of this is to highlight the context of the organizations we studied (Table 17).

Table 17. Case Study Organizations Database.

COUNCILS

Organization	Background	Geography	Land Ownership
Coast Fork Willamette WC	Founding Year: 1999 501(c)(3) incorporation: 2010	Lane County, Oregon Service Area: 435,000 acres Streams: 3,058 miles 303(d) Streams: 111.7 miles	Federal: 36.2% Private: 33.8% Private Industrial: 29.49% State & Local Government: < 1%
North Coast WA	501(c)(3) incorporation: 2001	Clatsop County, Oregon Service Area: 222,720 acres Streams: 417 miles 303(d) Streams: 164 miles	Private: 60.8% State Government: 39.2%
Powder Basin WC	Founding Year: 1996 501(c)(3) incorporation: 2008	Baker County, Oregon Service Area: 2,150,400 acres Streams: 4,833 miles 303(d) Streams: 1,223 miles	Private: 49.8% Federal: 49.7% State Government: < 1%
South Fork John Day WC	Founding Year: 1996 501(c)(3) incorporation: 2018	Grant County, Oregon Service Area: 546,850 acres Streams: 362 miles 303(d) Streams: 155 miles	Federal: 84% Private: 7% State Government: 9%

DISTRICTS

Organization	Background	Geography	Land Ownership
Curry SWCD	Incorporation: 1953 Curry Watersheds Partnership Formed: 2017	Curry County, Oregon Service Area: 1,047,707 acres Perennial Streams: 4,043 miles 303(d) Streams: 336 miles # of HUC-8 sub-basins: 7	Federal: 65.4% Private: 33.3% State Government: < 1%
Marion SWCD	Incorporation: 1949 Taxing District: 2000	Marion County, Oregon Service Area: 751,594 acres Perennial Streams: 1,789 miles 303(d) Streams: 291 miles # of HUC-8 sub-basins: 6	Private: 56.6% Federal: 30.2% Private Industrial: 8.2% State Government: 4.1% Tribal & Local Government: < 1%
Wheeler SWCD	Incorporation: 1963	Wheeler County, Oregon Service Area: 1,098,145 acres Perennial Streams: 937 miles 303(d) Streams: 148 miles # of HUC-8 sub-basins: 6	Private: 71.1% Federal: 28.7% State Government: < 1%

Appendix 5. External Capacity-Building Programs Review

As part of this project, we reviewed organizational capacity-building programs that invest in local organizational capacity in natural resources and conservation management to develop recommendations for OWEB’s Operating Capacity grant program (see Appx 5.C. Summary of External Capacity-Building Programs Review). We started by looking at Washington, California, and Idaho, but since there were a limited number of capacity-building programs, we expanded our search to look across the U.S. For this review, we defined organizational capacity in terms of administrative management, financial, and technical capacities (Table 18). Following this, we shared our list of inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Table 18. Defining Organizational Capacity.

Administrative Management	Management skill training, networking with other local partners, peer learning, and building partnerships with other organizations to share staff expertise (e.g., technical skills, outreach, and fundraising).
Financial	Pooling financial resources and financial management strategies, practices, and/or training.
Technical	Technical skills training, e.g., learning GIS.

Inclusion Criteria:

- Improves capacity for a council, district, or non-profit organization that works at local or regional scales (e.g., community, county, watershed, subregion of a state).
- Targets work that focuses on building organizational capacity. We primarily included programs focused on capacity building for natural resources and conservation management, but we also included some that worked in other areas. For example: Ford Family Foundation offers a Community Building grant that focuses on organizational capacity building in rural communities, which can include organizations that work on natural resource issues.

Exclusion Criteria:

- Programs that only provide funding for on-the-ground restoration work.
- Programs that target and invest in organizations that work at a national scale. The funder providing organizational capacity-building grants could be at the national scale, but to be included, must support regional or local organizations.

A. Program Highlights

In this section, we highlight key features and opportunities for improving OWEB and ODA capacity grant programs from the capacity-building program review. Following this, we provide potential recommendations.

Integrate Mentorship and Peer-Learning Opportunities into Program Design

The Ford Family Foundation’s Community Building Grants Program supports organizations through coaching, mentoring, and connecting grantees to related ongoing efforts and relevant resources, including the foundation’s own programs. During a 2019 program evaluation to identify the program’s impacts and ongoing challenges to community-building work, they developed the following recommendations to improve peer support: (1) mobilize communities to reach communities (e.g., invest in an anchor person in each community, develop mentorship

groups, convene learning exchanges, etc.) and (2) clarify the confusing aspects of the community-building approach (e.g., simplify materials, develop a clear introductory path to people who are new, etc.). The Wilburforce Foundation's Capacity Building Program design focuses on providing long-term capacity-building and views organizational leadership as a key to an organization's efficiency and effectiveness. They partner with service providers that offer specialized consulting, coaching, and training on leadership development, board capacity, strategic planning, fundraising, financial management, human resource management, communications, technology, and more. Through this, they also convene organizations and partners to share knowledge to work towards advancing outcomes that benefit a regional ecosystem. Additionally, Lake Champlain Basin Program's Organizational Support Grant offers supplemental funding for professional development. Local watershed organizations can apply for an annual \$500 mini-grant for professional development. This can be used for conference attendance, registration, and associated travel costs.

Offer Funding Support to Develop Strategic Plans

The Pennsylvania Department of Conservation & Natural Resources' Peer Grant offers funding to hire a professional consultant to study specialized small-scale issues to work with community leaders to develop an action plan addressing conservation needs. The maximum grant award is \$10,000.

Coordinate with External Funders

The Ford Family Foundation's Community Building Grants program emphasizes the importance of working with external funders. As part of a recent self-directed evaluation, they identified the program's need to develop strategies for long-term partnerships (e.g., working with other foundations to develop tools for grant applications, demonstrating that long-term grants make a difference, etc.). Additionally, the Wilburforce Foundation's Capacity Building Program's design acknowledges the need to build and maintain strong relationships with organizations, agency leaders, decision-makers, funders, scientists, etc. to improve grantees' effectiveness. They also recognize the need to collaborate with funders to ensure that collective investments and capacity resources are coordinated and effective.

Identify Potentially Useful Indicators for Improving Capacity Program Monitoring

Types of Partners Engaged

- Builds and maintains strong relationships with grantees, funders, scientists, decision-makers, and other allies - *Wilburforce Foundation's Capacity Building Program*.
- Increases communication, cooperation, and collaboration among grantees, funders, scientists, and government decision-makers - *Wilburforce Foundation's Capacity Building Program*.
- Facilitates and coordinates public messaging with management partners (e.g., strengthening the feedback loop between resource managers and community members) - *Lake Champlain Basin Program's Organizational Support Grant*.

Partnership Types Engaged In

- Serves as an information conduit, builds professional capacity among partners, and fosters strong working relationships (e.g., supporting seminars, workshops, and conferences to deliver technical information on topics) - *Lake Champlain Basin Program's Organizational Support Grant*.
- Organizations are successful in agreeing on the design and implementation of watershed and/or landscape scale enhancement projects - *National Forest Foundation's Community Capacity & Land Stewardship Program*.

Internal Governance and Operational Practices (*Focusing on strategic planning)

- Extent to which the proposal will strengthen the capacity of eligible organizations to achieve their mission and to implement priorities detailed in the Opportunities for Action Plan- *Lake Champlain Basin Program's Organizational Support Grant*.
- Merit of the proposal and the extent to which the proposal will result in tangible benefits or improvements that can be clearly measured - *Lake Champlain Basin Program's Organizational Support Grant*.
- Appropriateness and clarity of the proposed budget, relative to project objectives - *Lake Champlain Basin Program's Organizational Support Grant*.

B. Potential Recommendations

Coordinate with Service Providers on Mentorship and Peer-Learning

OWEB and ODA can continue to support and coordinate with their service providers (e.g., NOWC, OACD, OCEAN, OrCP, and the SWCD Operations Specialist) to provide tailored services to grantees. Many of the topics mentioned in the Wilburforce Foundation's program design were also of interest to interviewees. These included: specialized consulting, coaching, and training on leadership development, board capacity, strategic planning, financial management, and HR management. Additionally, new lead staff may have different needs than those who have been in this position longer. This emphasizes the importance of mentorship and peer-learning networks to create information exchanges and learn from each other's experiences.

Mini-Grants for Professional Development

Councils and districts may benefit from mini-grants for professional development, which would particularly be useful for lead staff since they are typically funded by project grants. Providing a small grant for professional development could help support lead staff in developing new skills or improving existing ones.

Technical and Financial Support for Strategic Plan Development

Strategic planning processes are shaped by their regional contexts, are varied based on the organization's structure, and serve different functions depending on how the organization is managed. Strategic plans, may have more detail or less, depending on these factors. Councils and districts can benefit from technical and financial support from OWEB and ODA and other supportive organizations to assist their strategic planning and annual work plan processes to incorporate diverse perspectives and needs and engage in relevant technical expertise for identifying restoration and conservation priorities.

Coordinating with and Educating External Funders on the Significance of Longer-Term Funding

OWEB and ODA have provided ongoing, programmatic support for 20 years to councils and districts' efforts in improving local watershed quality and health. OWEB has also developed longer-term funding strategies to help support grantees in partnership capacity and larger landscape scale restoration through their Partnership Technical Assistance, Focused Investment Partnership grants. External funders often see OWEB and ODA as essential funding partners in getting restoration work done on the ground through these locally-based councils and districts. As such, OWEB can play a role in educating funders on the significance of longer-term grants to work toward landscape-scale restoration and conservation.

C. Summary of External Capacity-Building Programs Review.

Sponsoring Organization and Program Name	Program Design, Activities and/or Objectives	Eligibility Requirements	Match Requirement	Evaluation Criteria and Selection Process	Allowed Costs and Uses	Program Implementation and Monitoring Measures
OWEB's Council Capacity Grant Program	<p>(1) Support organizational growth with access to diverse skill sets.</p> <p>(2) Develop broad and deep support from local and regional communities.</p> <p>(3) Engage a balance of interested and affected people, businesses, and communities in their watershed to participate in voluntary, cooperative conservation.</p> <p>(4) Secure diversified funding and/or build strategic collaborations with other councils and/or natural resource groups to increase collective local capacity.</p>	<p>(1) Designated as a watershed council by a local government.</p> <p>(2) Has previously received a Council Capacity grant, and which serves an area that is the same or larger than the geographic area served by a council or group of councils as of 2013 with only 1 applicant per geographic area & includes a minimum population of 500 within its designated boundaries.</p> <p>(3) Adopted action plan by a council-governing body that meets OWEB requirements.</p> <p>(4) 501(c)(3) registered with Oregon, or written fiscal sponsorship agreement with a 501(c)(3), SWCD, city, county, or tribal government.</p> <p>(5) Adopted bylaws/charter & policies/ procedures that include standard best-practice governance provisions. <i>(See Appx. 1 for full description of eligibility criteria in rule.)</i></p>	\$1 match	<p>(1) Effective Governance and Management.</p> <p>(2) Progress in Planning.</p> <p>(3) Progress in On-the-Ground Watershed Restoration.</p> <p>(4) Progress in Stakeholder Engagement for Watershed Restoration Purposes.</p>	<p>(1) Staff and contractors.</p> <p>(2) Audit and tax preparation costs.</p> <p>(3) General IT Support.</p> <p>(4) Contracted grant administration.</p> <p>(5) General office material & supplies.</p> <p>(6) General training.</p> <p>(7) Software or software subscription, free, or lease (e.g., GIS access).</p> <p>(8) General office rent, utilities, janitorial, yard maintenance, copier lease, P.O. box rent.</p> <p>(9) Insurance.</p> <p>(10) Banking fees, payroll service fees, business license fees, dues</p> <p>*Any expense eligible in other OWEB grants is also an eligible expense for Council Capacity grants.</p>	<p>Continued progress in meeting evaluation criteria. If the organization continues to meet eligibility criteria and makes progress in meeting evaluation criteria, the organization continues to receive funding. Funding levels include: (1) full funding if the council meets all criteria, (2) reduced funding if the council meets some criteria, and (3) do not fund if the council's performance is inadequate.</p>
ODA's District Capacity Grant Program	<p>Capacity funds are divided into two categories:</p> <p>(1) Scope of Work (SOW): Support working with partners and landowners for the conservation and protection of natural</p>	<p>Must be an SWCD and in compliance with legal requirements of ORS 568:</p> <p>(1) Current annual and long-range business plans</p> <p>(2) Annual audit</p> <p>(3) Annual report of activities</p>	\$1 match.	None.	<p>(1) Contracted services (e.g., labor, supplies, materials, travel for project implementation).</p> <p>(2) Travel.</p> <p>(3) Materials and supplies.</p> <p>(4) Equipment/Software.</p>	None.

	resources of native fish and wildlife, watersheds, and water quality through implementation of Agricultural Water Quality Management Area Plans. (2) District Operations: Help SWCDs comply with ORS, conduct business, and provide assistance to landowners and partners.	(4) Annual meeting of the landowners of the district.			(5) Other (e.g., project-specific printing, renting meeting rooms, software subscriptions, website domain, etc.).	
National Forest Foundation's Community Capacity & Land Stewardship Program	(1) Remove barriers to watershed and/or landscape scale restoration projects. (2) Facilitate job creation, retention, and business development. <i>Length of grant funding:</i> 8 months. <i>Can grantee apply again:</i> Yes. Encouraged to apply for continuing work or for new projects, contingent on demonstrated success. <i>Grants awarded per year:</i> ~10. <i>Award range:</i> Up to \$20k.	501(c)(3) nonprofit; federally-recognized Native American tribes; and colleges and universities.	No cash or in-kind match is required, but applicants are encouraged to leverage additional funds to demonstrate broad project support.	(1) Tangible benefits to National Forests & Grasslands. (2) Job creation, business development, or workforce development benefits. (3) Facilitate restoration actions and treatments. (4) Support or help advance the transition to young growth-based forest management.	(1) Outreach and plan development. (2) Workshops and training for capacity building (e.g., facilitation, contracting, etc.). (3) Dissemination of best practices and tools to assist community-based nonprofits & collaborative groups in project development, implementation, and monitoring. (4) Organizational and staff support for facilitation, technical assistance, networking, & peer-to-peer evaluations for shared learning. (5) Travel for collaborative group activities. (6) Development of action plans, project strategic documents, or other collaborative process documents.	(1) Organizations are successful in agreeing on the design and implementation of watershed and/or landscape scale enhancement projects. (2) Organizations accomplish activities that directly support or help advance the transition to young growth-based forest management. (3) Organizations have developed plans for facilitating job creation and retention that will lead to improved watershed health.
Ford Family Foundation's Community	Organizations are invited to submit a grant by Rural Community Building staff.	(1) Be invited by Rural Community Building staff. (2) 501(c)(3) non-profit,	Must have >= 50% of funding for the total	(1) Community participation is a primary	(1) Training, communications, and gatherings.	The foundation conducted a self-directed evaluation

<p>Building Grants</p>	<p>The program supports organizations through coaching, mentoring, and connecting grantees to related ongoing efforts and relevant resources, including the foundation’s own programs.</p> <p><i>Program Objectives:</i></p> <p>(1) Deepening Community Connections. (2) Strengthening Community Capacity. (3) Taking Community-led Action. (4) Fostering a Community Builder Culture.</p> <p><i>Length of grant funding:</i> Typically 1 year, but offers multi-year grants on a limited basis.</p> <p><i>Can grantee apply again:</i> Yes, if the organization does not have a currently active grant with the Foundation.</p> <p><i>Grants awarded per year:</i> 75.</p> <p><i>Award range:</i> - \$2k to \$350k. - Average: \$50k. - Large: \$100k.</p>	<p>governmental entity, or a federally recognized tribe. (3) Serve communities in rural Oregon or Siskiyou County, California. (4) Requests are for no more than 1/3 of the total project cost.</p>	<p>project budget committed before applying.</p>	<p>consideration, demonstrated through >= 50% of project fundraising raised through the organization’s traditional supporters, local businesses, key donors, and other foundations. (2) Involvement of the organization’s board with cash or in-kind contributions. (3) Well-defined benefits or outcomes with a description of who and why the community is behind the proposal.</p>	<p>(2) Planning, coordination, capacity building, and regional networking. *They will not fund sponsorship of fundraising events.</p>	<p>in 2019, evaluating the program’s impacts and ongoing challenges to community-building work. They developed the following responses to address these:</p> <p>(1) Mobilize communities to reach communities (e.g., invest in an anchor person in each community, develop mentorship groups, convene learning exchanges, etc.). (2) Build capacities to reach the hard-to-reach (e.g., listening sessions, relationship building, etc.). (3) Develop strategies for long-term partnerships (e.g., work with other foundations to develop tools for grant applications, show that long term grants make a difference, etc.). (4) Clarify the confusing aspects of the community-building approach (e.g., simplify materials, develop a</p>
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						clear introductory path to people who are new, etc.).
Oregon Community Foundation's Community Grants Program: Capacity-Building	<p>To help strengthen and stabilize an organization's governance, operations, internal culture and/or community relationships.</p> <p><i>Length of grant funding:</i> 1 year.</p> <p><i>Can grantee apply again:</i> No, unless considered a small, rural or culturally-specific organization.</p> <p><i>Grants awarded per year:</i> 370.</p> <p><i>Award range:</i> - Average: \$20k. - Large: \$40k.</p>	501(c)(3) organization, or fiscal sponsorship with a 501(c)(3), Tribal entity, or government entity.	No cash or in-kind match is required, but applicants are encouraged to leverage additional funds to be more competitive.	<p>(1) Prioritizes organizations that support disproportionately impacted communities (e.g., BIPOC, immigrants, people experiencing disabilities, etc.).</p> <p>(2) Supports organizations that demonstrate strong community support (e.g., intentional engagement and representative support of communities being served).</p> <p>(3) Propose work that advances DEI.</p>	N/A	N/A
Wilburforce Foundation's Capacity Building Program	<p>(1) Supports organizations committed to science-driven conservation efforts and sustainable policies for critical wildlife habitat.</p> <p>(2) Use conservation science to identify priority regions with a focus on wildlands and habitat connections.</p> <p>(3) Build and maintain strong relationships with organizations, agency leaders, decision-makers, funders, scientists, etc. to improve organizations' effectiveness.</p>	Supports current 501(c)(3) grantees.	None.	No longer accepting grant applications. They provide long-term capacity-building support to increase organizational knowledge and skills. They invest in Training Resources for the Environmental Community (TREC) to provide grantees with support for fundraising, board capacity, strategic	Programs are tailored to current grantees to meet their capacity needs. They invest in leaders, organizations, and campaigns, partnering with service providers that offer specialized consulting, coaching and training on leadership development, fundraising, financial management, human resource management, communications, strategic planning, technology, and more.	<p>(1) Builds and maintains strong relationships with grantees, funders, scientists, decision-makers, and other allies.</p> <p>(2) Improves the effectiveness of grantee organizations, their leaders, conservation scientists, and other allies.</p> <p>(3) Increases access to and use of</p>

	<p>(4) Invest in the capacity of our grantees and their leaders to help them become more efficient and effective.</p> <p>(5) Convene organizations and partners to exchange knowledge and advance shared outcomes.</p> <p>(6) Collaborate with funders to ensure that collective investments and capacity resources are coordinated and effective.</p> <p><i>Length of grant funding:</i> Typically, 1 year. May fund multi-year grants if they discuss with a representative why the program would benefit from this.</p> <p><i>Can grantee apply again:</i> Yes, if an organization does not have a currently active grant with the Foundation.</p> <p><i>Grants awarded per year:</i> 153.</p> <p><i>Award range:</i> \$10k - \$250k.</p>			planning, etc..		<p>scientific, legal, political, and economic resources to advance conservation plans, policies, and practices.</p> <p>(4) Increases communication, cooperation, and collaboration among grantees, funders, scientists, and government decision-makers.</p> <p>(5) Increases conservation's social and political relevance in the communities and priority regions in which we work.</p> <p>(6) Decreases or mitigates threats to lands, waters, and wildlife, while improving the ecological resilience, and improving the protected status of these areas.</p>
Lake Champlain Basin Program's Organizational Support Grant	<p>(1) Strengthen watershed organizations during development.</p> <p>(2) Assist established watershed organizations in strengthening their organizational capacity.</p>	501(c)(3) organizations or voluntary watershed associations working with an established 501(c)(3) organization.	No in-kind or cash match is required, though match will be considered favorably	(1) Impact (40 points): Extent to which the proposal will strengthen the capacity of eligible organizations to achieve their	<p>(1) Staffing & fringe benefits.</p> <p>(2) Supplies (e.g., photocopying, mailing, purchasing equipment, technology, software subscriptions).</p>	<p>Support priorities in <i>Opportunities for Action Plan</i>. Examples include: (1) Supports local watershed groups (e.g.,</p>

	<p>(3) Facilitate work and communication within and among local communities to further watershed protection and restoration efforts.</p> <p>(4) Local watershed organizations can also apply for an additional annual \$500 mini-grant for professional development.</p> <p><i>Length of grant funding:</i> 1.5 years.</p> <p><i>Can grantee apply again:</i> Yes, if the grant is for a new project, contingent on demonstrated success.</p> <p><i>Grants awarded per year:</i> ~ 11.</p> <p><i>Award range:</i> Up to \$4k.</p>		<p>during budget review and may make proposals more competitive.</p>	<p>mission and to implement priorities detailed in <i>Opportunities for Action Plan</i>.</p> <p>(2) Merit (30 points): Merit of the proposal and the extent to which the proposal will result in tangible benefits or improvements that can be clearly measured.</p> <p>(3) Budget (30 points): Appropriateness and clarity of the proposed budget, relative to project objectives.</p>	<p>(3) Professional services (e.g., hiring a consultant to integrate DEI into organizational documents, participating in training to learn how to create online videos to improve outreach).</p> <p>(4) Travel costs associated with building partnerships.</p> <p>(5) Indirect (e.g., paying auditor, liability insurance, auto insurance).</p> <p><i>Specific to professional development mini-grants:</i></p> <p>(1) Meetings, conferences, and other venues' activities must be related to improving water quality and/or improving organizational capacity (e.g., fundraising, computer training).</p> <p>(2) Travel, meals, registration, and lodging to attend training.</p>	<p>providing technical assistance through meetings, workshops, presentations, and training; working with partners in priority watersheds to provide technical support and capacity building).</p> <p>(2) Facilitates and coordinates public messaging with management partners (e.g., strengthening the feedback loop between resource managers and community members).</p> <p>(3) Serves as an information conduit, builds professional capacity among stakeholders, and fosters strong working relationships (e.g., supporting seminars, workshops, and conferences to deliver technical information on topics).</p>
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<p>Pennsylvania Department of Conservation & Natural Resources' Peer and Circuit Rider Grant Programs</p>	<p><i>Specific to Peer Grant:</i> Funding to hire a professional consultant to study specialized small-scale issues to work with community leaders to develop an action plan addressing conservation needs. <i>Maximum grant award:</i> \$10k.</p> <p><i>Specific to Circuit Rider:</i> Annual funding gradually decreases over a 4-year period. The purpose is to hire a professional, full-time staff person (i.e., Circuit Rider) to initiate new regional programs and services that position sponsoring entities to more efficiently and effectively meet their natural resource and conservation needs. Includes training expenses (up to \$2k) and mentoring expenses (up to \$1.5k) for an approved mentor to assist new staff.</p>	<p>County or municipal government.</p> <p><i>Specific to Circuit Rider:</i> Two or more municipalities must cooperate in a new intergovernmental or regional effort by adopting an intergovernmental agreement.</p>	<p><i>Specific to Peer Grant:</i> 10% local cash or in-kind match.</p> <p><i>Specific to Circuit Rider:</i> Must provide local funds to cover the Circuit Rider's employee benefits for all 4 years, the balance of the salary in years 2, 3, and 4, and normal support services (e.g., office space, training and travel expenses, clerical support, equipment, etc.).</p>	<p>Grantees must submit an evaluation of the organization's guiding documents (strategic plan, annual work plan, management action plan, interpretive plan, etc.) to determine the specific project(s), work tasks, outputs, and outcomes they would like to accomplish with grant funding.</p>	<p><i>Specific to Peer Grant:</i> Hire a professional consultant.</p> <p><i>Specific to Circuit Rider:</i> Hire a professional full-time staff person.</p>	<p>None listed for Peer Grant.</p> <p><i>Specific to Circuit Rider: <u>Annual Report</u></i> (1) Goals and objectives met or unachieved. (2) Accomplishments & challenges. (4) Programs created. (5) Marketing. (6) Budget. (7) Training programs attended. (8) Training programs requested for next year. (9) Evaluating grant program's assistance.</p> <p><u>Final Report</u> How has the cooperative become a valued service? Which groups gained the most? What would happen if the agency folded? How did the cooperative effort encourage other areas of intergovernmental cooperation?</p>
<p>Minnesota Board of Water</p>	<p>Supports increased capacity by funding</p>	<p>Must be an SWCD.</p>	<p>None.</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>(1) Staffing (2) Office rent, utilities,</p>	<p>Report expenditures,</p>

<p>and Soil Resources’ Clean Water Fund Capacity Grant</p>	<p>expenses in the following categories: Staffing, Cost Share/Incentives, Technology/Capital Equipment, and Operations.</p> <p><i>Length of grant funding:</i> 1 year.</p> <p><i>Can grantee apply again:</i> Yes, provides ongoing support.</p> <p><i>Grants awarded per year:</i> 90 (Supports all SWCDs in the state).</p> <p><i>Award range:</i> \$108k.</p>				<p>and other costs associated with facility maintenance (3) Supplies and equipment. (4) Conservation practice cost-share and incentive.</p>	<p>measurable outcomes, and activities from the previous calendar year as outlined in the grant agreement. May withhold grant payments if the grantee is not in compliance with all reporting requirements.</p>
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