

## Mid-Columbia Economic Resilience Team Meeting March 27, 2020

Jessica Metta (MCEDD) started the meeting with introductions and a reiteration that this group was meeting to share information. She provided a recap of the Guiding Principles of the group, noting that the group's core purpose is to serve the region's communities, businesses and employees by maximizing resources through enhanced collaboration between agencies at local, state and federal levels.

Jessica highlighted the bi-state daily digest and the collection of resources at [mcedd.org/ready/](https://mcedd.org/ready/) and reminded the group to send feedback and information to include to [jacque@mcedd.org](mailto:jacque@mcedd.org).

Senator Ron Wyden provided federal updates to the group. He noted that the federal relief package passed today (CARES Act), with the intent to give employers and employees tools to pay their bills so they can bounce back more quickly after the immediate crisis. Senator Wyden noted there are two major economic priorities in the bill – to help workers replace lost wages and to support small business owners. Benefits to workers include an additional \$600 per week for unemployment benefits for up to four months and will now include benefits for those traditionally not eligible, such as part-time workers, those who are self-employed, gig workers, independent contractors, etc. The bill focuses on helping small business owners and employers retain employees or bring them back once the crisis is over, through the provisions of 1) a refundable tax credit for business owners and 2) the expansion of various FDA programs, grant and loan programs, and loan forgiveness programs for business owners for the next six months. Overall, about \$3.3 billion will come to Oregon to provide relief to employers and employees.

Greg Price, asked: "Under Title 1 Department of Agriculture, under rural development there is \$25M in long distance learning and \$100M in re-connect broadband. How can we as a rural community position ourselves for that assistance?" Senator Wyden stated that information would be up on his website shortly at <https://www.wyden.senate.gov/>. The site will also have a page for COVID-19 [information](#) and [resources](#).

Anne Medenbach asked: "Of the \$9.5 billion for agricultural producers, how much of that is going to be focused on small farms and ranches, how are those determined and how would they be able to access these resources?" Senator Wyden answered that he believes the vast majority of that money will be allocated to small agricultural producers and noted that it was important to him and his team to provide relief for small specialty producers who are a staple in Oregon and the Pacific Northwest.

There was a question from Lisa Farquharson regarding financial relief packages for organizations classified as 501C(6), which includes most Chambers of Commerce. Kathleen Cathey of Wyden's staff acknowledged that financial relief provisions for Chambers were not included in the most recent package that passed but noted that Chambers are classified as nonprofit organizations and are therefore eligible to apply for SBA disaster loans.

Additional questions submitted by the group for the Senator are listed at the end of the minutes.

Subsections of this team have been focused on analyzing the impacts on partners and industries. Jessica asked representatives of these groups to report out. She noted this is especially helpful for the Oregon legislators on the call as they prepare for a special session. Jessica indicated that MCEDD would include the notes from these groups with the minutes.

- Chambers/Tourism: Lizzie Keenan (Hood/Gorge Regional Destination Marketing Organization) reported that the tourism and hospitality sector has experienced significant impacts as a result of stay-at-home orders, lodging closures for tourism purposes in Hood River, state parks closures in Washington and Oregon, closure of recreational Forest Service sites in the Gorge, and closure of Friends of the Gorge managed lands. Small business owners and their employees have been drastically impacted and face a number of financial issues like the inability to pay employees or bills to keep operations going. Small business owners are also worried about their ability to reopen once operations are allowed to resume. She also noted there is anxiety from businesses that are already paying off previous loans from prior disasters (winter weather, fires).

Lizzie noted that there is concern over the stability of Chambers, who are funded primarily by membership dues, events, and tourism tax dollars, all of which are currently impacted. Depending on how Chambers have set up their budgets they will experience the impacts of lost revenue streams within the coming months to the next fiscal year.

Lizzie noted that they have developed a form for economic development partners to collect feedback from businesses that will inform strategies for the Resilience Team moving forward as well as be shared with Business Oregon. Lizzie also encouraged individuals to keep emailing her ([Lizzie@hood-gorge.com](mailto:Lizzie@hood-gorge.com)) or Michael Held at Business Oregon ([Michael.Held@oregon.gov](mailto:Michael.Held@oregon.gov)) with feedback from small businesses if that was a more efficient way to share information

- Oregon & Washington Ports: Michael Held (Business Oregon) reported that the Hood River Bridge and the Bridge of the Gods have temporarily stopped toll collections, which is anticipated to result in six figure revenue losses. Ports are currently troubleshooting to ensure that toll collecting is safe and equitable and hope to have toll collection systems back up soon. Ports are also experiencing challenges with tenants, and have found themselves needing to provide flexibility in working with tenants at this time. So far breweries, food processors, restaurants and other small businesses in and around the ports have taken the brunt of the initial impact of local economic losses; tech companies are faring better but full impacts remain to be seen. Cruise ship operators are cancelling trips and the U.S. Coast Guard is cancelling port calls at the mouth of the Columbia River through at least June 1.
- Agriculture: Carrie Pipinich (MCEDD) noted that representatives from key crop areas, including dryland wheat and cattle, fruit producers, and small farmers presented their priorities and immediate needs. In terms of immediate response, the Food Security Coalition has seen a significant rise in the need for the Columbia Gorge Food Bank's resources. The Coalition is identifying ways to support food deliveries with other partners in order to meet community needs. There is some concern around small farms that rely on direct-to-restaurant sales as sources of revenue but small farms have also seen an uptick in CSA utilization and many smaller producers have still been able to get their crops directly to consumers. Gorge Grown is opening their Hood River Farmer's market in April to provide local producers and consumers with this resource. On the dryland front, representatives highlighted that producers have experienced some confusion with how state and federal regulations align and stating the need for clear communication and resources to support interpretation with a special emphasis on employment related policies. The fruit growers sought to flag concerns about how producers will plan for this year's upcoming harvest. Some producers in the region leverage the H2A program but, many also travel from California to Oregon and Washington. There is interest in being proactive about working collaboratively with California and Washington as well as the Federal Government to ensure that this critical labor flow can occur safely. Producers are also keeping an eye on supply

chains with impacts on timing due to quarantine of goods coming into the country as well as potential costs as well as ability to get PPE to support safe practices for agricultural workers as spraying begins.

Erick Garman (Oregon Department of Agriculture) noted that producers of nonessential goods in the value added agriculture sector are experiencing a lack of new orders through retailers and distributors. Some retailers and distributors are also trying to push back contract timelines by 45 days as opposed to 30 days.

Heather Ficht (East Cascades Workforce Investment Board) and Amy Martinez (South Central Workforce Council) provided an update for the discussion around Workforce impacts. Heather recommended job seekers or anyone who has been impacted by the crisis to apply for unemployment insurance online or over the phone. WorkSource Centers are open by appointment only and cannot help individuals to process claims. Heather also noted that it is important to demonstrate the local impacts of the crisis to in order to reflect the need for resources to help with recovery and resilience. Contact Mike Scroggs (Oregon Rapid Response Coordinator) with any feedback from employers ([mscroggs@cgcc.edu](mailto:mscroggs@cgcc.edu)). Heather noted that Oregon has submitted a \$25 million disaster recovery grant application.

Amy Martinez (South Central Workforce Council) noted that WorkSource offices in Washington have smaller capacity and are closed to in person meetings; everything is now being operated virtually. WorkSource offices in Washington have been distributing information via the Columbia Gorge WorkSource Facebook page. Other statewide responses include offering a virtual statewide job fair to reach people for the industries that are still hiring. Virtual classes are also being offered on Zoom for job seekers to enhance professional development skills. In areas where broadband connection is spotty, WorkSource is sending participants printed materials in the mail. Information about businesses impacts in Washington can be sent to Amy Martinez ([amy.martinez@co.yakima.wa.us](mailto:amy.martinez@co.yakima.wa.us).)

Pat Albaugh (Port of Skamania County) provided an update for Skamania County. Skamania EDC has enacted a three month payment deferral program for businesses unable to make their loan payments during this time and has also been helping businesses fill out SBA loan applications. The EDC also has an emergency relief loan program in place that provides up to \$40,000 for businesses in need. The Port is also allowing its tenants to defer rent if needed without any penalties at this time.

Richard Foster (Klickitat County Economic Development) added that Skamania and Klickitat counties received \$83,000 from the U.S. Department of Commerce – funds reallocated from the CDBG program.

Jessica Metta noted that MCEDD updated its business loan program for MCEDD and Oregon Investment Board to provide two or three months of loan deferment if needed. Emergency relief loans will be capped between \$15,000-25,000.

Jessica also notified the group that Hood River News announced their closure. Local newspapers are an essential community resource.

Greg Price (CGCC SBDC) stated that the local SBDC has seen 100-fold increase in the number of clients reaching out. Staff has been working to expand capacity to meet needs. Some of the biggest concerns from small businesses have been around loan programs that only provide benefits for businesses with employees when there are many small businesses in the region do not have employees. Additionally, many benefits are tax-credit based, and there are many small businesses without a high level of tax liability. SBDC is also still advising individuals to apply to the EIDL SBA loan program and explore their

options with local lenders as well. Greg noted that SBA's website is currently down and they are not currently accepting applications online. Business owners are being encouraged to get their financial statements in order and in-hand to make the application process a lot smoother.

Nate Stice (Oregon Governor's Regional Solutions Office) introduced several state legislators and their staff who joined the call, including Sen. Chuck Thompson, Reps. Anna Williams and Daniel Bonham, and staff from the offices of Sen. Wyden (Kathleen Cathey, Jacob Engler), Sen. Merkely (Dan Mahr, BJ Westlund), Sen. Thompson (John Swanson), Sen. Bill Hansell (Evan Bryan), Rep. Anna Williams (Justin Withem), and Rep. Greg Smith (Patrick). The group provided additional feedback related to flexibility for Business Oregon to be able to use their revolving funds to help businesses, support for Chambers, and identifying regionally appropriate methods for distributing resources. The legislators and staff encouraged the group to reach out to them with concerns and needs. Nate Stice encouraged legislators to rely on economic development partners to support connecting constituents to resources around employment and business needs.

Jessica proposed that this group meet again **next Friday, April 3 from 11:00am-12:30pm** and requested feedback and potential focus areas for the coming meeting.

Additional questions provided by attendees for Senator Wyden:

- How the budget process for special districts would be impacted as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. With the way rules are currently written certain aspects of the budget development process calls for in-person meetings, which is currently prohibited under social distancing state guidelines. Andrea asked how the state legislature plans on addressing the rules governing public meetings by the budget deadline on July 1.
- Many small businesses applying for forgivable loans do not have employees and will not be eligible for as much forgiveness under the current EIDL program. Is the state doing anything to cover that gap?
- Nonprofits are concerned that healthcare premiums for July renewal will skyrocket because of healthcare costs; anything in federal stimulus to address this?
- Lots of folks don't normally apply for unemployment benefits because they haven't earned enough in the past year. Should they be encouraged to apply to access the Federal UI add-on?
- Sen. Wyden's thoughts on EDA role in stimulus legislation? Considering that Trump has proposed eliminating that agency?
- What assistance is there for people who lose their health insurance because they've lost their job?

## MID-COLUMBIA ECONOMIC RESILIENCY TEAM

### CORE TEAM

March 27

Nate Stice	North Central Regional Solutions	x
Greg Price	Columbia Gorge Community College/Small Business Development Center	x
Jessica Metta	Mid-Columbia Economic Development District	x
Carrie Pipinich	Mid-Columbia Economic Development District	x
Jacque Schei	Mid-Columbia Economic Development District	x
Greg Svelund	Oregon Department of Environmental Quality	x

### TOURISM

Kate Schroeder	Hood River County Chamber of Commerce	x
Tammara Tippel	Mt. Adams Chamber of Commerce	
Lisa Farquharson	The Dalles Area Chamber of Commerce	x
Dana Peck	Goldendale Chamber of Commerce	x
Angie Waiss	Skamania County Chamber of Commerce	x
K'Lynn Lane	Condon Chamber of Commerce	x
Lizzie Keenan	Mt. Hood & Columbia Gorge Regional Destination Management Organization	x
Stephanie Anderson	Maupin Chamber of Commerce	
Ashley Huckaby May	Visit Hood River Council	x
Emily Reed	Columbia Gorge Tourism Alliance	x
Wendy Popkin	Oregon Restaurant & Lodging Association	x

### PORTS

Olga Kaganova	Port of Cascade Locks	x
Pat Albaugh	Port of Skamania County	x
Andrea Klaas	Port of The Dalles	x
Michael McElwee	Port of Hood River	
Anne Mendenbach	Port of Hood River	x
Marc Thornsbury	Port of Klickitat County	x
Peter Mitchell	Port of Arlington	x

### EMPLOYMENT

Heather Ficht	East Cascades Workforce Investment Board (OR)	x
Stephanie Siebold	East Cascades Workforce Investment Board (OR)	
Eric Proffitt	Worksource Oregon	x
Leticia Valle	Washington Employment Security Department	x
Kallie Kurtz	Washington Employment Security Department	
Amy Martinez	South Central Workforce Council (WA)	x
Mike Scroggs	Oregon Rapid Response Coordinator	x
Alberto Isiordia	Washington Employment Security Department	
Sondra Pieti	Washington Employment Security Department	

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Michael Held	Business Oregon	x
Ryan DeGrofft	Business Oregon	x
Tom Schnell	Business Oregon	x
Lynn Longan	WA Department of Commerce	
Carrie Pipinich	Wasco/Sherman EDO	x
Kevin Waters	Skamania Economic Development Council	
Dave McClure	Klickitat County Economic Development	x
Richard Foster	Klickitat County Economic Development	x
Lisa Atkin	Gilliam County	x
Rachel Weinstein	Gilliam County Community Development	x
Tami Stockton	Wheeler County Economic Development	x

**ECONOMISTS**

Dallas Fridley	Oreogn Employment Department	x
Scott Bailey	Washington Employment Security Department	x

**CONGRESSIONAL STAFF/REPRESENTATIVES**

Sen. Ron Wyden	Office of Senator Ron Wyden	x
Kathleen Cathey	Office of Senator Ron Wyden	x
Jacob Egler	Office of Senator Ron Wyden	x
BJ Westlund	Office of Senator Jeff Merkley	x
Dan Mahr	Office of Senator Jeff Merkley	x
Bryan Stebbins	Office of Senator Patty Murray	x
Richard Evans	Office of Senator Maria Cantwell	x
Rep. Daniel Bonham	Oregon House of Representatives	x
Rep. Anna Williams	Oregon House of Representatives	x
Justin Withem	Office of State Representative Anna Williams	x
Evan Bryan	Office of State Senator Bill Hansell	x
Patrick	Office of State Representative Greg Smith	x
Chuck Thompsen	Oregon State Senate	x
John Swanson	Office of State Senator Chuck Thompsen	x
Abe Friedman	Office of Senator Maria Cantwell	
Jonathan	Office of Senator Maria Cantwell	

**OTHER SUPPORT**

Erick Garman	Oregon Department of Agriculture (exports)	x
Aaryn Rassmussen	Columbia Gorge Regional Airport	
Krystyna Wolniakowski	Columbia River Gorge Commission	
Dan Spatz	Columbia Gorge Community College	x
Teresa Cummings	Columbia Gorge Community College	x
John Huffman	USDA Rural Development - Oregon	
Charlotte Bentley	USDA Rural Development - Oregon	x

Tatiana Eckhart  
Eric Nerdin

Mid-Columbia Economic Development District  
USDA Rural Development - Oregon

x