

Future Ready Oregon (Senate Bill 1545, 2022)

In 2022, the Oregon State Legislature passed Senate Bill 1545, also known as Future Ready Oregon, providing a comprehensive \$200 million package of investments that work together to advance a more equitable and racially just workforce system.

The investments strategically leverage state General Fund and federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) resources to promote collaboration and innovation in workforce and talent development. Future Ready Oregon intentionally engages historically underserved and underrepresented communities in education and training programs that lead to employment in key sectors of our economy—healthcare, manufacturing, and technology—and other in-demand occupations.

Advancing a Diverse Workforce

Oregon entered the decade with a declared need of 300,000 additional postsecondary credentials to prepare adult workers for a future of increasingly complex work. The disruption created by the pandemic exacerbated the workforce crisis and highlighted significant disparities in how our workforce system serves Oregon's communities of color and other marginalized populations.

Future Ready Oregon expands equitable opportunities for a diverse workforce and advances Oregon's economic competitiveness. Investments focus on key sectors of Oregon's economy that provide short-term pathways to meaningful employment, higher earning potential, and opportunities for economic mobility in communities across Oregon.

Future Ready Oregon emphasizes a comprehensive approach to equitable prosperity, providing diverse jobseekers with culturally and linguistically relevant career-connected learning and employment services, and connecting businesses to the skilled labor they need for growth.

Informing an Equitable Workforce System

- **Workforce Benefits Navigators** (\$10 million) – Funded by ARPA, this investment places benefits navigators at WorkSource Oregon one-stop centers and community-based organizations across the state. Navigators provide a single point of contact to help individuals efficiently access the resources that match their unique needs and navigate the different programs and benefits available for workforce education and training. Local workforce development boards will implement pilot projects beginning in 2023.
- **Industry Consortia** (\$1 million) – Three separate, statewide Industry Consortia will be convened to represent the healthcare, manufacturing, and technology industry sectors. The purpose of each consortium is to establish strategic partnerships between employers, education and training providers, and community partners; identify statewide industry-specific workforce needs and high-value credentials; and advance recruitment and retention strategies that increase diversity in industry-specific job opportunities and career pathways.

Investing in Innovative Workforce and Talent Development

- **Workforce Ready Grants** (\$95 million) – Competitive grants are available to community-based and culturally specific organizations and workforce service providers to create and expand education and training programs in the key sectors of healthcare, manufacturing, and technology; expand organizational capacity to provide workforce development services; and provide direct benefits to training participants. These benefits include stipends for earn-and-learn experiences and funding to pay for education, training costs, job readiness supplies, and wraparound supports and services. In fall 2022, the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) awarded \$10 million to 41 projects administered by community-based organizations and workforce service providers across the state to expand organizational capacity and engage new partners in workforce education and training. A second round of funding will advance innovation in workforce programs, incentivizing partnerships and collaboration between employers, education and training providers, and community-based and culturally specific organizations. Awards are anticipated in fall 2023. Additional phases of grant funding will be available through 2024.

Future Ready Oregon investments support recruitment, retention, and career advancement opportunities for:

- **Priority Populations** – communities of color, women, low-income communities, rural and frontier communities, veterans, persons with disabilities, incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals, members of Oregon's nine federally recognized tribes, older adults, and individuals who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community; and
- **Key Sectors** of Oregon's economy – healthcare, manufacturing, and technology.

- **Prosperity 10,000** (\$35 million) – Oregon’s nine local workforce development boards distribute funds to nonprofit community-based organizations, educational institutions, labor organizations, and other workforce service providers to offer services. These services include career coaching, paid training opportunities, scholarships, stipends, and wraparound supports. All nine boards received their first allocation of \$15 million in General Funds based on a formula funding model in May 2022. They will receive their second and final allocation of \$20 million in ARPA funding in early 2023. The local workforce development boards are investing in innovative approaches to addressing regionally significant workforce needs, expanding existing relationships, and advancing new partnerships.
- **Community College Career Pathways Programs** (\$14.9 million) – Community College Career Pathways are education and training programs connected to student support services that enable individuals, particularly from priority populations, to secure a job or advance in a high-wage, high-demand industry. This investment continues and expands Career Pathways efforts at each of Oregon’s 17 community colleges. Grant-funded activities include purchasing equipment, providing student support services, aligning with other programs, developing or expanding certificate programs, and conducting a variety of recruitment and re-engagement strategies.
- **Credit for Prior Learning** (\$10 million) – This investment enables Oregonians to receive credit for knowledge and skills gained through work and life experience, including military training, significant work experience, and formal and informal education and training from higher education institutions in the U.S. and in other countries. Grants were competitively awarded to 14 community colleges and 5 public universities in 2022 to scale-up Credit for Prior Learning systems across all academic areas.
- **Youth Programs** (\$10.5 million) – Administered by Oregon’s Youth Development Division, this investment provides youth ages 14-24 from priority populations with increased access to workforce readiness and academic programs, including diploma and GED completion, mentoring and coaching, career exploration, and paid work experience.
- **Registered Apprenticeship** (\$20 million) – Administered by the Oregon Bureau of Labor & Industries, this investment develops, expands, and implements registered apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship training programs in healthcare, manufacturing, and technology, and pre-apprenticeship programs in construction.

Assessing Impact and Accountability

The HECC’s Office of Research and Data is responsible for the evaluation of Future Ready Oregon investments across the state enterprise annually. Assessment centers on two questions:

1. Does Future Ready Oregon lead to greater economic security?
2. Does Future Ready Oregon lead to greater equity, especially racial equity?

To answer these questions, the HECC’s assessment examines access to the funding and workforce training programs, how these investments are put into practice, and what the outcomes reveal about the economic and equity impacts of Future Ready Oregon. In addition to documenting the impact of Future Ready Oregon, ongoing assessment also informs the HECC’s efforts to continuously improve the grantmaking process, making funding opportunities more inclusive and accessible.

The Year One Report, published in December 2022, focuses on early implementation of Future Ready Oregon. Subsequent Annual Reports will evaluate participation in Future Ready Oregon programs, including degree completion, credential attainment, and job placement rates compared to statewide educational attainment goals and long-term employment projections, and disaggregated by race and ethnicity, age, gender, and geographical area.

For more information, email FutureReadyOregon@HECC.Oregon.gov

Inclusive Engagement & Grantmaking

The HECC has taken steps through the implementation of Future Ready Oregon to ensure an inclusive, low-barrier grantmaking process that advances access to opportunities for organizations serving priority populations and those who are new to the workforce system. Steps include:

- Providing supports for applicants, including technical assistance, language translation, and accessible application materials;
- Emphasizing the direct, intentional support for and engagement of Priority Populations and cultural competency demonstrated via lived experience, and specific knowledge of community strengths, the impacts of discrimination, and disparities in access;
- Prioritizing partnerships and collaboration to engage historically underserved and marginalized populations, advancing innovation, and building capacity;
- Expanding efforts to connect with and engage organizations new to providing workforce services; and
- Leading with learning by building communities of practice and providing ongoing technical assistance and training to support grant recipients.