

OREGON RURAL TOURISM STUDIO

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

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The Oregon Rural Tourism Studio program is a training program designed to assist Oregon communities that have identified tourism development as one of their priority economic development strategies. The program assists rural communities with the development of their tourism industry in a way that will help stimulate the local economy, protect and enhance local natural and cultural resources, and foster pride amongst participants. As a result of the program, Travel Oregon hopes to see an increase in high-value, authentic experiences for travelers across the state that will contribute to community livability and help strengthen our state's position as a premiere tourism destination in North America.

Travel Oregon will deliver the curriculum in concert with key partners who bring expertise in subjects of importance to the program. Currently, Travel Oregon is working with Future iQ Partners (formerly Innovative Leadership USA), Rural Development Initiatives, Sustainable Travel International, Great Destination Strategies, Mercy Corps Northwest, Bricker Consulting, Altitude Essentials and Write to Know Consulting to design and deliver curriculum. Currently, Travel Oregon delivers this intensive program to two destinations each year; one in the fall and one in the spring.

PROGRAM GOALS

The goals of the Rural Tourism Studio program are to:

- Raise the awareness and understanding of the value of the tourism industry and important trends;
- Engage a broad cross-section of the community – including civic and business leaders – in a dialogue to identify strengths and opportunities for capitalizing on trends in the tourism industry;
- Spark creativity and enthusiasm in community leaders to contribute to making Oregon a premiere tourism destination;
- Connect community and business leaders with resources to help develop new authentic tourism products and leverage the assets they have;
- Develop tourism experiences and products that sustain or enhance the geographical character of a place—its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well-being of its residents.
- Stimulate new local business development;
- Establish positive relationship between community leaders and the state's tourism development and marketing organizations.



RURAL TOURISM STUDIO

INTENDED PROGRAM OUTCOMES

As a result of participating in the program, **communities** will come away with:

- A vision for tourism in the region;
- A set of priority actions for tourism development in key niche markets;
- A comprehensive list of tourism assets upon which to build;
- Engaged project leaders at the local level who can take workshop outcomes and manage the timeline, partners, and project deliverables;
- Momentum on at least one new project that can begin immediately following the program; and
- Preferred applicant status for the Travel Oregon annual Matching Grants Program for up to \$10,000.

At the end of the program, **participants** will come away with:

- An appreciation of tourism's role in the Oregon economy and its potential locally;
- New skills and knowledge for applying to business endeavors and community projects;
- New connections with others in the community and in the state with similar interests and ambitions;
- A strong foundation in marketing essentials with knowledge of regional and state programs to leverage;
- New connections to tourism development specialists and resources that can be called upon during project implementation;
- A clear sense of what action steps can be taken in the community to enhance the destination; and
- A certificate of completion.

PROGRAM DETAILS

Nature of a studio: The term "Studio" was purposefully chosen for the name of the program to indicate that this will be a participatory and hands-on experience for all participants. The modules will be carefully designed to have a balance of new information and new skills for practical application. Sessions will involve active participation to encourage learning by doing and to create leave behind products that will be useful to the community long beyond the duration of the program.

Sustainable tourism principles: The program has been designed using a set of sustainable tourism principles (see pg. 12). We will be learning how to develop tourism in this region using these principles throughout the program.

Customized program: Each series of workshops is customized to fit the needs of a participating community or cluster of communities. Travel Oregon works with a local steering committee to customize the program curriculum at the outset. The local steering committee typically involves the Regional Destination Marketing Organization and the Destination Marketing Organization of the participating community or area as well as other business or community leaders as deemed appropriate to assist with the program. The steering committee also hosts the program and communicates with constituents in the participating region.

Duration: The Rural Tourism Studio program takes place over four two-day back to back sessions over the span of four months. Because participants in the tourism industry will be busiest May through September, the program will typically run late fall through mid-winter and again mid-winter through early spring. A typical schedule might be October through January (fall) and again February through May (spring).

Participants: The program is designed to engage a broad cross-section of community leaders from rural communities. The program will be delivered in one community that may serve as a central point for a cluster of communities that may define themselves in a common region. Ideally the program will engage 25-35 participants from diverse perspectives from a given region. Specifically, we hope to engage small business leaders, entrepreneurs, tourism industry professionals, community planners, economic development professionals, public land managers, elected officials, non-profits with social, environmental and cultural missions, and community volunteers. We strive for diversity in the program by engaging representatives from all cultural and socio-economic segments of the population from youth to community elders.

Cost to participating community: Travel Oregon's goal is to make this a low-cost program for participating communities. In order for us to do so, we must enlist the help of the community! In order to host the Rural Tourism Studio Program, community leaders must assist with the program in the following ways.

- Establish a local steering committee to help set the direction and customize the program;
- Distribute information about the program to target communities;
- Solicit involvement from community members;
- Design a tour of the community's local tourism assets;
- Provide a meeting space for the workshops to take place;
- Provide information on local caterers (and arrange catering when possible);
- Provide support to community members at the completion of the program to ensure that the tourism plan results in action;
- Assist with program evaluation; and
- Serve as ambassadors for the process.

As a result of this contribution, the standard program is very low cost to community members. Should a community want to go beyond the basic program by adding extra modules or enlisting the more extensive services of a partner organization, a fee for services arrangement is possible.

Participant Responsibilities: While the program is inexpensive, we ask that participants take the program seriously. In order to get the most out of the program, participants need to be willing to:

- Attend all sessions;
- Arrive at 10-15 minutes early to each session to settle in so that the session can start right on time;
- Participate fully and respectfully;
- Fill out participant evaluations following each workshop; and
- Work actively with the local steering committee after the program ends to assist with implementing the priority actions identified during the program.

PRINCIPLES OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

In 2003, the Oregon Tourism Commission commissioned research on national and international best practices in tourism to shape a set of sustainable tourism principles to guide local tourism planning. Rural Development Initiatives conducted the research and developed a set of principles that have since been shaped by the Oregon Tourism Commission and the Oregon Sustainable Tourism Advisory Committee to arrive at what we use today.

Sustainable tourism...

1. Is integrated with and respectful of the culture, homeland, heritage, and people of a place

Tourism enhances communities by increasing local awareness and pride in what makes each place and its people special.

2. Provides a unique and authentic experience for the visitor

Visitors leave satisfied, excited, and more knowledgeable about the locale. They bring new vacation stories home and send friends off to experience the same thing.

3. Generates localized economic development benefits

Diverse opportunities are created for local entrepreneurs, local jobs and many locally owned businesses to grow and reinvest in the community.

4. Generates development that has a balanced and beneficial impact on the environment

Businesses and communities choose green techniques for constructing and operating facilities in a way that conserves resources, utilizes local materials and reduces environmental impacts.

5. Generates revenue that is invested in conserving and enhancing the unique features of the community

A portion of tourism revenue supports efforts such as open space preservation, conservation efforts, educational programs, and social programs.

6. Provides an educational experience for the visitor that leaves them enriched and inspired to create positive change at home

Residents share local knowledge, history, customs and the unique ways in which we do business in a way that has a positive and lasting impact on the visitor.

7. Encourages diverse parties to work together to create new opportunities and to address common challenges

Communities are successful at leveraging and coordinating the efforts of many diverse people and entities.

8. Serves target markets that are profitable, with promising long-term viability

Tourism leaders target market segments most likely to appreciate, respect, and disseminate information about the distinctive assets of the locale.



RURAL TOURISM STUDIO

MATCHING GRANT PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Travel Oregon is currently reviewing the Rural Tourism Studio Matching Grant process. During this review, we will take a look at how The Ford Family Foundation administers funds for the community project grants to communities that have completed leadership training as part of the Ford Institute Leadership Program. We anticipate adopting a similar process.

Below are basics regarding Travel Oregon's Matching Grant program for the Rural Tourism Studio. Some of these details may change as a result of the review process. We will provide you with final grant details at our last workshop on *Fundraising for Tourism and Developing Action Teams* in May.

- After successful completion of the Oregon Rural Tourism Studio, one matching grant application may be submitted by a participating member of the local Rural Tourism Studio Steering Committee for up to \$10,000 in matching grant funds.
- A one-to-one match will be required to receive matching grant funds. In-kind contributions can be used for up to half of the match provided. For example, if you are applying for a \$10,000 matching grant, you can provide a match of \$5,000 in cash and \$5,000 worth of in-kind contributions.
- Matching grant projects must be aligned with and in support of the local priorities identified in the Rural Tourism Studio program.
- Matching grant applications will likely be due six months after the completion of the Rural Tourism Studio.
- Matching grant application details specific to this program will be provided to participants in the *Fundraising for Tourism and Developing Action Teams* workshop in May.

