

Oregon Tourism Commission Briefing October 3, 2022

Best Western PLUS Hood River Inn
1108 East Marina Way
Hood River, OR 97031

Tourism Commissioners present include: Richard Boyles, Lucinda DiNovo, David Gremmels, David Penilton, Maria Ponzi, Erin Stephenson, Greg Willitts, and Scott Youngblood.

Chair Boyles opens the meeting at 10:00 a.m. and welcomes those who are here today for the Oregon Tourism Commission briefing.

Chair Boyles introduces our newest Commissioner, David Gremmels and ask for him to say a few words.

Commissioner Gremmels states his excitement in joining the Commission and for the work that Travel Oregon has done under Todd's leadership over the years. He is grateful for the work that goes into promoting the state and conveys that it's the values of Travel Oregon's work that makes him excited for the future of this work; stewardship, prosperity, equity and stewardship. Is the continued stewardship that keeps Oregon on the maps and Oregon as one of the 5 top destinations in the world.

Chair Boyles asks the remaining Commissioners to introduce themselves.

Commissioners Youngblood congratulates Commissioner Gremmels' Oregon Business Magazine recent recognition of Rogue Creamery being name the No. 1 sustainable green business in Oregon.

Todd welcomes David Gremmels to the Commission and thanks him for his commitment to a wonderful product and to his devotion to stewardship of this place we all get to call home. Todd states that David has been involved in previous campaigns and familiar with Travel Oregon's work.

Todd states that two of Travel Oregon's programs of work that the Commission is getting ready to hear are pre-information to decisions that the Commission will be asked to make at the upcoming December Commission meeting.

Grant Guidelines and Grant Program Update

Todd welcomes Lisa IteI, Director of Global Strategic Partnerships and Michelle Woodard, Grants Manager to provide the Commission with a grants update. Todd conveys his excitement for this presentation and states that he's had the opportunity to review this presentation, and appreciates the deep care and thoughtfulness about how we can best serve the state of Oregon through our grants program.

Lisa and Michelle walk the Commission through a Grant Program Update PowerPoint presentation that includes:

- Travel Oregon Competitive Grants Program Review including amounts awarded since 2017 and an overview of regions that have received those grants
- Total dollar amount of awards given versus requested
- Total number of applications submitted versus awarded

- Review of the fall 2022 Capacity & Small Project grants
- Review of possible scenarios for spring 2023 \$3.5M Competitive Grant Program
- Review of Small, Medium and Large Grant thresholds

Todd thanks Lisa and Michelle for their work on the grants program and the care and thoughtfulness that goes into this program, listening to partners and stakeholders to be able to support our industry. The impacts that even small grants amounts can provide to a community in need can be so impactful, so I am grateful for this work, this program and our staff who care for it. Todd clarifies that this is an opportunity for the Commission to review the guidelines and what the \$3.5M available for the spring could look like for the grant program.

Commissioner Penilton states that he's been fortunate enough to see the impacts Travel Oregon's grants can make. Asks where equity is called out in the fall Capacity grants.

Michelle states that in the guidelines, it calls out the opportunity for DEI training. In terms of reach, we are trying to fund as many requests as possible.

Commissioner Stephenson states that she has a background in grant administration and understands the amount of work that goes into that. Asks if these capacity grants be used to fund a position.

Michelle states that the funds could be used to fund a position, but need to be used within a year. Michelle states that it could be used for administrative staff, to run a specific project or for contractors.

Commissioner Stephenson asks how those positions would then be funded in the future.

Michelle states that the ask is for a plan that would provide a vision for that position for three years – to see a longer-term vision on what they see a position being. If these funds can be used as a short-term fix to serve a longer-term goal, that would be ideal in their plannings with their boards and organizations.

Lisa states that adding capacity to be able to search for other funding in the future could prove a pivotal opportunity for longer-term functionality.

Commissioner Ponzi asks if the capacity grant is a matching grant.

Michelle states that the capacity grants are not – but intention is to get back to matching grants in spring 2023.

Commissioner Ponzi asks who can apply for capacity grants?

Michelle states that Oregon Destination Marketing/Management Organizations and tribes are able to apply. The spring grant program will be open to broader group.

Commissioner Ponzi suggests the potential of allowing AVAs (American Viticulture Areas) to apply for the Capacity and Small grants as those businesses tend to focus on stewardship.

Chair Boyles asks how many DMOs there are in the state who would potentially be available for this funding.

Michelle states that there are about 85 DMOs listed on the TO website, along with federally recognized 9 tribes. We don't anticipate all DMOs applying but are hoping they will apply.

Chair Boyles asks what an average amount could be for the Capacity and Small project grants.

Michelle states that up to \$20,000. These organizations tend to have greater need and a smaller budget.

Commissioner Willitts asks of the applicants who don't receive TO funds, how many reapply?

Michelle states that about 40-50% reapply and explains that part of the work of the grants team is to help applicants refine and revamp their applications to be applicable for future Travel Oregon grants. Good projects will get funded even if not through Travel Oregon awards.

Lisa states that Michelle and Louisa are part of the statewide funders group, looking and finding other opportunities for these good projects to get funded.

Commissioner Penilton asks if there is a way to measure a success rate of grants awarded.

Michelle states that finding a way to measure a success rate will be something she will work with our research team on.

Commissioner Youngblood asks how the grant writing workshops are done through RDMOs.

Michelle states that an online grant writing workshop is available online and a further series of grant trainings will be posted soon. States that the trainings focus were purposefully left broad enough to help those seeking funds through Travel Oregon along with other funding resources.

Chair Boyles asks if the intent is to award all of the \$1.5M Capacity & Small Projects money.

Michelle states that yes, that is the intent.

Commissioner Ponzi asks what the timeline is for the capacity grants.

Michelle states that the hope is to award the funds by end of year, and for projects to be completed by end of next year (2023).

Commissioner DiNovo asks about matching grants and if that match will come back.

Michelle states that for smaller projects there is less benefit for match, but for larger grants there is more buy in for those projects and the intent would be to make those larger grants, matching grants.

Todd thanks the Commission for their thoughts and states that staff will look forward to coming back and hearing final recommendations at the December Commission meeting.

Regional Cooperative Tourism Program (RCTP) Guidelines Update

Todd asks Teresa O'Neill, VP of Global Strategic Partnership and Harry Dalgaard, Director of RCTP to join us and provide an update on the RCTP program guidelines in support of the work we carry out with our RDMO partners.

Harry walks the Commission through a Regional Cooperative Tourism Program (RCTP) Guidelines PowerPoint presentation including:

- Overall Changes to the Guidelines
- Review of the 3 phase Planning Cycle
- Budget Overview

- Proposed Budget Overview
- Menu of Investment Opportunities
- Staffing
- Reporting and Metrics
- Subregional Allocations

Harry thanks all of the RDMOs for their insights on these guidelines.

Teresa states her appreciate to Alana Hughson for her perspective and recommendations as she represents the smaller RDMOs.

Todd thanks Harry and Kate for their thoughtful work on these guidelines. Aligning the planning cycle for RDMOs to Travel Oregon's planning cycle for strategic planning and budget is the right thing to do. The subregional allocations are different than subregional planning – and this change will allow for regions to directly allocate resources to county and local DMOs to carry out some of the work in the regional strategy. The other significant change is the lifting of the 30% cap on staffing – which isn't insignificant. This change from being able to provide funding for staffing rather than mostly programming to support the needs and flexibility to regional partners. Destination stewardship work is highly staff resource heavy and this change allows for that work to be supported.

Vice-Chair DiNovo states that she received a very thoughtful and supportive email from the coast RDMO in the support for the changes.

Commissioner Penilton states that starting to implement the Strategic Vision work is important. Allowing for flexibility for staffing is wonderful and he affirms his support for this body of work.

Commissioner Ponzi asks for a reminder on how much funding the RCTP program distributes.

Harry affirms that it is 20% of the transient lodging tax (TLT) received, close to \$6.2 million. The regional investments and programming that happens at the regional level is very large and takes a lot of work.

Teresa affirms that allowing for the staffing flexibility supports the differences of the regions.

Chair Boyles states that this program helps create alignment between Travel Oregon and the regions throughout the state. Asks about the RDMOs capacity and expertise to run their own grant program.

Harry clarifies that RDMOS could run a traditional grant program or do a direct investment process. Having RDMOs help provide resources to tourism programs in need – helps keep them aware of and in alignment with DMOs in their regions.

Todd clarifies that this grant funding allocation is not new.

Chair Boyles asks if an RDMO could also support additional funding of a grant that Travel Oregon has awarded?

Harry confirms that an RDMO could provide additional support and states that funds could be given to address grants administration as well.

Commissioner Gremmels congratulates the team for their work with the regions to develop and support this program. Moving from quarterly to real-time tracking of resources for real time management is impressive.

Commissioner Youngblood asks with the opportunity for real time information, what the cadence to oversight and measurement will be.

Harry states that RCTP staff will continue to quarterly check-ins with RDMOs and that the RDMO dashboards are updated quarterly as well to see how their investments are being resourced.

Commissioner Youngblood asks when the RCPT contracts will be up for renew again.

Teresa states that those will be renewed in 2025.

Vice-Chair DiNovo asks about the outlined proposed metrics and KPIs.

Harry states that those will be measured against Travel Oregon's KPIs moving forward.

Gorge Tourism Destination Management Studio Outcomes

Todd states that the last presentation today is an opportunity to celebrate this beautiful part of the state we are in for the next couple of days – the Columbia River Gorge. It will also provide some great context and excitement for our time together this afternoon touring Hood River's amazing Fruit Loop. Todd asks Scott Bricker, Interim VP of Destination Development and Emily Reed, Network Director of the Columbia Gorge Tourism Alliance to join us and provide a Network update.

Scott introduces Emily Reed and walks the Commission through a Gorge Tourism Destination Management Studio Outcomes PowerPoint presentation that includes:

- Review of Destination Management Studio Goals, Actions and Outcomes
- Review of key partners and rolls with the Gorge Network
- Review of key focus areas of the Gorge Network
- Review of key network messaging processes

Todd thanks Emily for her work in stewarding this process along to keep this program on track.

Commissioner Penilton thanks Scott and Emily for their work. Commissioner Penilton states that the work that because of all the new efforts and work in the Gorge, his tour business brings people to the Gorge. States that having businesses support and focus on the accessibility is important.

Commissioner Ponzi asks about trail management and the permitting process.

Emily states that the Commission will hear more about the permit process tomorrow.

Commissioner Ponzi states her appreciation for the accessibility work and asks if we are doing enough to guide visitors who need special accommodation as to where they can easily go to access that information.

Todd discusses Travel Oregon's work with TravelAbility to focus and highlight accessibility on the consumer website – to help guide visitors on where they can go.

Kevin states that there is a lot happening in that space including a playbook about accessibility website development. It also includes highlighting the work of many small DMOs and sharing those best practices. The market is massive and there are many opportunities for those resource investments.

Commission Penilton states that Oregon is well positioned and well represented to support and move forward the accessibility work.

Vice-Chair DiNovo states that she is so impressed by the work happening in the Gorge and happy to have a network in Coos Bay working on tourism and stewardship issues as well.

Commissioner Willitts ask how many natural assets in the Gorge are still closed.

Emily states that most of them are open, but a few that were damaged from the Eagle fire are still closed.

Todd thanks Emily and Scott and states that Emily will join the tour this afternoon.

Vice-Chair DiNovo states her appreciation for Travel Oregon and Lisa for her work on the Guide to Indian Country guide that just came out. States her late husband would have been so proud of this work, especially that all of Oregon's nine federally recognized tribes are represented in the guide.

Chair Boyles adjourns the meeting at 12:05 p.m.