

## WordBridge Case Study

Communicate programmatic changes to inform and engage passionate stakeholders

The Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) is a state agency that provides grants to help Oregonians take care of local streams, rivers, wetlands and natural areas.

OWEB hired me to advise upon and develop communication tools for creating shared understanding among internal and external stakeholders regarding OWEB's short and long-term goals for its Watershed Council Support Grant program.

Armed with in-depth source material collected over several years of a thorough discovery phase, I interviewed a group of stakeholders to ensure I was linked in to their trigger points. From all this information, I identified key messages and developed succinct internal talking points to rally internal stakeholders around a common message. In addition, I created a four-page public guide with supporting graphics to convey key points and data most relevant to the target stakeholders. Along the way, I enjoyed thoughtful conversations with my clients to test reactions and refine the messaging to ensure that the communication tools achieved their goal of clarifying a complex program change to people who are passionately involved in their work to enhance and protect Oregon's watersheds.



# Guide to Outcome-Based Watershed Council Capacity Grants

## Oregon's statewide approach to watershed restoration has evolved.

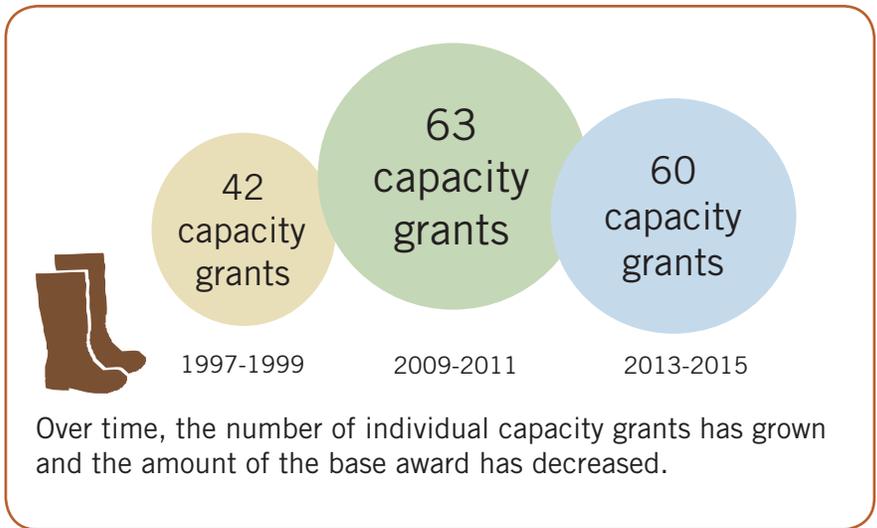
In the 15 years since the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) began funding council capacity grants, Oregon's waterways, uplands and natural habitats are healthier because of the dedicated work of watershed councils.

During that time, a number of fiscal and operational realities developed for councils and for OWEB that were not anticipated when OWEB first offered council capacity grants. Additionally, the number of applicant councils has grown and the geographic scale for grant applicants has trended smaller.

Passage of Ballot Measure 76 provided long-term funding for Oregon's voluntary, collaborative conservation, yet *councils today need more funding and resources than OWEB alone can provide.*

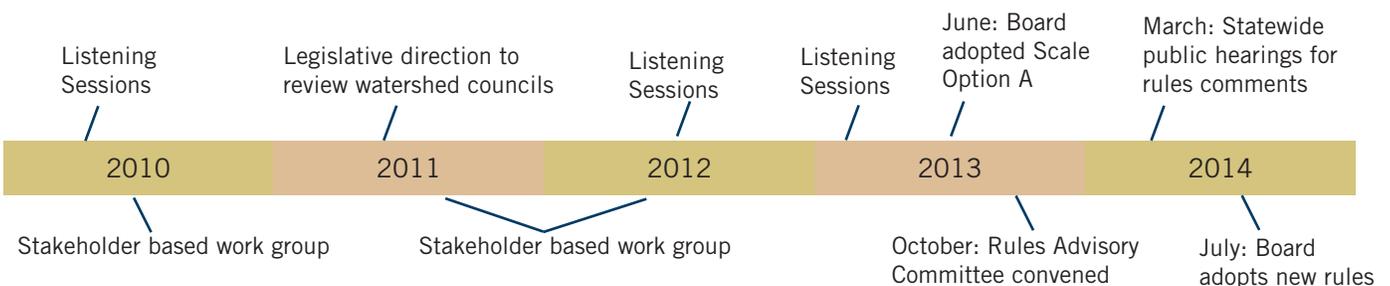
Council capacity grants are a core element of OWEB's Long-Term Investment Strategy for Conservation. The grants support operating costs for effective watershed councils.

Following direction from OWEB's board and the Oregon legislature, OWEB is updating its watershed council capacity grant program.



*OWEB envisions a statewide watershed restoration system that is resilient, sustainable and achieves ecological outcomes.*

## Timeline of OWEB's council capacity grant policy change process



## OWEB is implementing a new policy direction to reflect today's realities and raise the bar for performance and continuous improvement

Streamlined funding process

Transparent criteria

Increased accountability

Improved reporting

After nearly four years of stakeholder input and staff research, OWEB's board adopted a policy direction for outcome-based council capacity grants. It meets the statewide watershed restoration system where it is today and supports its future health.

- Build capacity through increased resource sharing and strategic collaboration
- Funding criteria are performance and outcome-based, and contain high standards for eligibility, reporting and accountability
- Maximum number of council capacity *grants* is 64, with the goal to reduce the number of individual support *grants* over 5-10 years

### How is OWEB helping councils during this transition?

This funding model is a new approach for OWEB as well as councils. We will continue to work closely with councils to address unknowns and provide early and frequent communications. Councils are effective and collaborative problem solvers, and we will learn from councils that have solutions in place, or develop new solutions. OWEB will:

1. Continue to provide operating support to previously funded councils that meet the eligibility and merit criteria;
2. Offer council action plan grants during 2013 and 2014 to help councils meet new eligibility criteria;
3. Offer technical assistance grants in 2013 and 2014 to help cover costs of developing new strategic collaborations and business models that show a likelihood of success for building capacity;
4. Network with other funders and organizations to learn what has and has not worked, and explore funder-to-funder capacity building partnerships;
5. Meet with council boards and members to talk about the changes and answer questions; and
6. Share examples and models for building capacity through resource sharing and strategic collaboration.



*OWEB can't predict or control future funding. OWEB is working with and encouraging councils to find solutions to reduce risk for tomorrow's unknown.*

# OWEB believes councils that explore or expand collaborations to build organizational capacity will increase their ability to achieve restoration and community engagement goals.

OWEB is not trying to change or limit the number of *councils* that exist today or in the future. We believe that a reduction in the number of *individual council capacity grants* will increase each grant's impact.

OWEB encourages councils to tap into the innovative and creative minds on their boards, the larger watershed community and nonprofit professionals around the state to explore solutions for building capacity.

## Councils have choices for building capacity

Rely primarily on OWEB?

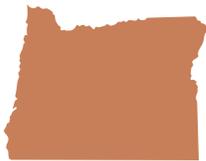
OWEB is not able to cover all capacity costs; its funding may be reduced in the future and it can't guarantee funding for every council that applies.

Diversify Funding?

Councils with a diversified funding strategy that includes OWEB as just one component could increase resiliency and reduce risk.

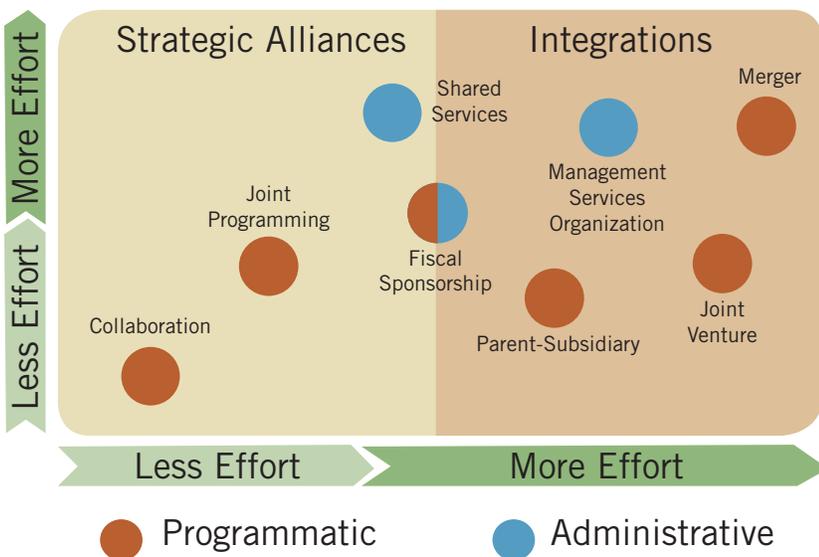
Collaborate or Integrate?

Strategic collaboration with other councils and/or natural resources groups may increase organizational effectiveness.



*OWEB wants to see councils that are strong organizations with access to diverse skillsets.*

## Strategic collaborations are not one-size-fits-all; they need to work for your council.



Strategic collaborations take many forms, and councils can maintain their autonomy and connection to the local community. Sharing administrative services may be the right answer for some councils, while a merger could work better for others. Collaborations can:

- Build economies of scale and increase cost savings;
- Strengthen partners' infrastructure, management capacity or service delivery;
- Create strategies and solutions to address common problems; and
- Cover skill gaps.

# Overview of eligibility and merit criteria for outcome-based council capacity grants

The framework below provides an overview of the proposed eligibility and merit criteria. The full text of the criteria will be presented to councils and the public for comment in March 2014

**Eligibility Overview** | In October 2013, OWEB distributed a detailed checklist to help councils prepare for new eligibility criteria.

Category	Current Criteria	Proposed Criteria
Governance	None	- Mission, bylaws, policies and procedures; action plan
Council Membership	OWEB rules not clear	- Balance of interests (required by statute)
Recognition	Any local government (unless formed before September 9, 1995)	- County-level (new or reorganized councils)
Scale for individual council capacity grants	- Open-ended - No duplicative coverage	- Encourage collaboration/resource sharing - Number of individual grants capped at no more than 64; we will not fund geographic areas smaller than are currently supported

**Merit Overview** | OWEB will distribute a detailed checklist to help councils prepare for new merit criteria.

Proposed Merit Criteria	How Evaluated
1. Strong organizational processes; engaged community.	- Effective, regular council meetings - Balanced participation
2. Demonstration of effective leadership by council board and staff.	- Adopted and implemented staff and board roles and responsibilities - Performance evaluations
3. Demonstration of ability to reach agreement and prioritize work among stakeholders.	- Outcomes-based planning - Annual work plan
4. Implementation of restoration projects that address priority watershed limiting factors.	- Progress toward the council's priority restoration actions (linked to watershed limiting factors and action plan) - Ability to address challenges
5. Successful community engagement in service towards voluntary land stewardship and restoration outcomes.	- Progress toward increased involvement - Ability to address challenges

For questions, more information or to schedule a board and/or member presentation on the changes to council support grants, please contact

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The information presented in this guide is based on data and draft policy language available as of December 2013.