

April 11, 2023

Department of Agriculture
Rural Business-Cooperative Service
Grant Administrator
Rural Innovation Stronger Economy (RISE) Grant [Docket #RBS-22-Business-0026]

**RE: Support for Lane Workforce Partnership's *Oakridge Rural Jobs Accelerator Project*
RISE Proposal**

Dear Grant Administrator,

As a partner in the Lane County Rural Jobs Accelerator Partnership, Lane County recognizes the importance of federal funding to help realize our goal of rural prosperity. Specifically, funding from the RISE program for workforce development will improve the economic vitality of rural Lane County communities, in particular the City of Oakridge and its surrounding area.

The City of Oakridge, a small, rural community located in southeast Lane County, Oregon, was once supported by a thriving timber economy. The steady decline of the timber industry left Oakridge with high unemployment, high poverty, vacant land, and an abandoned sawmill. In the mid-2000s, the City of Oakridge purchased the old mill site and created the Oakridge Industrial Park. With the development of the industrial park, the city created an opportunity to attract and grow businesses, repurpose vacant timber facilities, and bring living wage jobs back to the community through the future of the wood products industry, growth of entrepreneurship and business development, creation of a workforce pipeline, and development of the economic ecosystem in this region, which is within a designated Enterprise Zone.

One current challenge is the development of a trained workforce to attract businesses to either locate or establish a small business in the industrial park. Upskilling the residents for these opportunities will not only incent businesses to locate in Oakridge but will provide high-wage jobs that benefit families and the surrounding community.

Lane County supports Lane Workforce Partnership's RISE application and is committed to working collaboratively with the other proposal partners on our collective and aligned goals. The training strategies within this proposal are designed to fill current job vacancies, implement strategies to prepare the emerging workforce, and support entrepreneurs in job creation and business development.

Lane County strongly encourages the USDA to include Lane Workforce Partnership's application in its funding award decisions.

Sincerely,

Pat Farr, Chair
Lane County Board of Commissioners