



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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From Farmers Market to Grocery Shelves, Oregon Entrepreneurs Get Help Growing Their Businesses

Oregon Community Foundation awards \$905,000 through 39 Thriving Entrepreneurs grants statewide

A few years ago, Nora and Oscar Villasenor stood behind a table at local farmers markets, introducing customers to their new chili crisp, Al Xile. They listened to feedback, refined their approach and worked to build a business one conversation at a time.

With support from Built Oregon, a nonprofit that helps consumer-product entrepreneurs grow their businesses, the couple gained access to opportunities that would have been difficult to navigate alone. Today, their products are sold in about 60 locations across Oregon.

Stories like theirs are exactly what Oregon Community Foundation supports through its Thriving Entrepreneurs grant program. The statewide community foundation has just awarded \$905,000 through 39 grants to organizations across Oregon that help entrepreneurs launch businesses, strengthen operations and build long-term success.

The grant program supports entrepreneurs of all ages through capital access, coaching, technical assistance, business training and professional connections. Priority is given to organizations that serve people who have faced historic and ongoing barriers to resources and opportunities.

“It can be lonely to run a small business, and many entrepreneurs just need a little support to manage inventory, build systems or run their business more effectively,” said Jocelyn Beh, Economic Vitality and Housing Program Officer at Oregon Community Foundation. “This grant program is made to provide support for entrepreneurs who are experts in their craft but need to sharpen their business or operational skills.”

With support from OCF donors, the Thriving Entrepreneurs program has awarded more than \$3.5 million to 83 organizations across Oregon since 2021.

For Nora and Oscar Villasenor, Built Oregon's farmers market program helped them test products in different markets and gather immediate customer feedback. Through the organization's Market Access Program, they connected with grocery buyers, sharpened their sales pitch and secured placement in Market of Choice and later New Seasons. After participating in Built Oregon's Accelerator Program, they refined their strategy and expanded their reach.

“Our mission is to champion the people behind Oregon's consumer brands because they take the personal risk to create more innovative solutions and provide better economic resilience for our community,” said Katharine Reinhold, Executive Director of Built Oregon. “This grant opportunity will allow us to support more entrepreneurs around the state.”

Beh said organizations like Built Oregon demonstrate the role entrepreneur-support organizations can play in helping promising small businesses move from an idea to a sustainable company.

“The success of Oregon's entrepreneurs strengthens entire communities,” Beh said. “When small business owners have access to the right support, they create jobs, generate local economic activity and build opportunities that can last for generations.”

Other examples of Thriving Entrepreneurs grants include:

- **Xcelerate Women**, which connects women and gender-expansive entrepreneurs with volunteer experts who provide tailored coaching and support to help businesses grow and scale.
- **Northwest Native Chamber**, which provides culturally specific business support and connects Native entrepreneurs with a network of professional service providers offering specialized expertise and guidance.
- **High Desert Partnership**, which helps farmers, ranchers and food producers in Harney County through technical assistance, market coordination and local food market development.
- **Columbia Business Alliance**, housed within the City of Scappoose, is restoring free business advising and entrepreneurial support throughout Columbia County.
- **Regional Accelerator & Innovation Network**, which creates new opportunities for rural creative-sector entrepreneurs through education, mentorship and business development support.

The complete list of 2026 Thriving Entrepreneurs grantees is available [here](#).

About Oregon Community Foundation

Since 1973, Oregon Community Foundation has worked to improve the lives of all Oregonians through the power of philanthropy. Each year, OCF distributes more than \$200 million in grants and scholarships statewide in partnership with donors and volunteers. Individuals, families, businesses and organizations can work with

OCF to create charitable funds supporting causes important to them. Learn more at oregoncf.org.

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QUOTE SHEET: THRIVING ENTREPRENEURS 2026

Central Oregon Locavore

Grant supports workshops, advisory services and business development resources for local food producers.

“For 17 years, Central Oregon Locavore has worked alongside our region's farmers, ranchers and food producers, building not only relationships but years of local sales data that can help them make smarter business decisions. This grant from Oregon Community Foundation lets us turn that knowledge into even greater opportunity for our producers, helping them understand what's selling, price sustainably, plan for demand and ultimately grow sales.”

~Nicolle Timm-Branch, Executive Director

Oregon Agricultural Trust

Grant will expand support for agricultural entrepreneurs through technical assistance and business advising.

“Entrepreneurship is a cornerstone of Oregon's economy, and agricultural producers represent a significant, though often underserved, segment of the entrepreneurial landscape. With this grant, we will expand access to our programming so that more agricultural entrepreneurs have the resources they need to strengthen their operations, build financial resilience and achieve long-term business viability.”

~Nellie McAdams, Executive Director

Columbia Business Alliance

Grant will help restore free, local business advising and entrepreneur support throughout Columbia County.

“We are deeply thankful to Oregon Community Foundation for helping us restore free, localized business advising again in Columbia County. We're excited to get our advisors back to work to support entrepreneurs throughout the county.”

~Sierra Trass, Economic Development Specialist

Livelihood NW

Grant supports business advising and operational support for entrepreneurs who have faced barriers to opportunity.

“Every day, we see the determination, creativity and resilience that entrepreneurs bring to building their businesses and creating a better future for themselves, their families and their communities. At Livelihood NW, we are proud to walk alongside entrepreneurs who have historically faced barriers to opportunity and help them build the knowledge, systems and confidence they need to grow and sustain their businesses. We are deeply grateful to the Oregon Community Foundation Thriving Entrepreneurs Program for its continued investment in this work. OCF's ongoing partnership helps us reach more small business owners with the practical, high-quality support they need to turn their goals into lasting economic opportunity.”

~Lara Damon, Executive Director

Plaza de Nuestra Comunidad

Grant supports the Cambios Business Program serving Latinx and immigrant entrepreneurs.

“Supporting entrepreneurs from our Latinx and immigrant communities in initiating and building their businesses not only helps in the realization of individual dreams, but also secures generational wealth, protects our cultural fabric, creates jobs and fuels neighborhood commerce. We are deeply honored to receive this investment to uphold our culturally specific program and the recognition of the vital role businesses owned by people of color play in our community's future.”

~Evy Hernandez, Cambios Business Instructor

Oregon Entrepreneurs Network

Grant will expand Rural Innovators workshops and support entrepreneurs on Oregon's North Coast.

“OEN is thrilled to receive a 2026 Thriving Entrepreneurs grant to expand our Rural Innovators workshops to the North Coast. In our trial year, we worked with founders from Prospect to Parkdale, building programs to address food deserts that could be franchised to rural communities nationwide, locally manufactured devices to improve small orchardists' efficiency and wholesale purchasing platforms for small consumer packaged goods. The innovation in Oregon's rural communities is so impressive. We look forward to seeing what is being developed in Columbia,

Clatsop and Tillamook counties this year that can grow to be the region's next big employers.”

~Cara Turano, President and Executive Director

ORPIB Foundation Incubator Program

KnightCode is an educational tabletop role-playing game designed to build communication, collaboration and critical-thinking skills. Since joining the Foundation Incubator Program, Jen Lowrance has also begun the process of registering KnightCode with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, an important step in protecting the brand she has spent years building.

“My biggest accomplishment is really talking through and deciding to take the plunge on making a large-scale order for KnightCode's Foundation Kits. This came after months of conversations with my coach on exploring various ways I could move this work forward. It was through unpacking it and examining different ways this could work, what could unlock with a bigger batch and what the risks were, I decided it was worth moving forward to get to this next larger stage.”

~Jen Lowrance, KnightCode Founder

Central Coast Food Web

Grant supports small local fishers and farmers with increased outreach.

“We work with partners to find ways to divert fish waste into productive and useful products following Iceland Ocean Cluster’s lead in setting a goal of using 100% of the fish and increasing its value. This project and our work keep more local seafood local creates jobs, and internship opportunities, within the Blue Economy, increase the value of the catch, and introduce Oregonians to the best seafood available.”

~Jim King, Executive Director

African Economic Development Solutions/Little Africa

“We are grateful for the opportunity to partner with Oregon Community Foundation in advancing economic opportunity. Together, we are helping individuals and families build financial stability, strengthen their future and achieve lasting intergenerational prosperity.”

~Dr. Gene Gelgelu, MBA, PhD
Founder, President and CEO