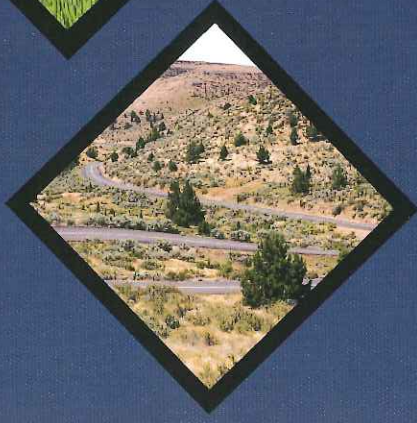
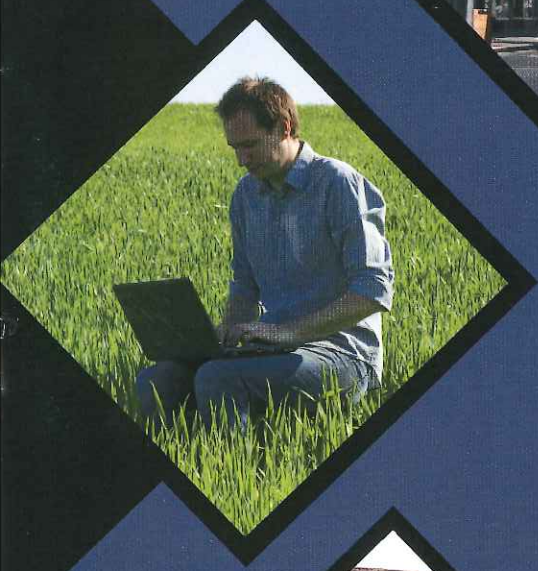
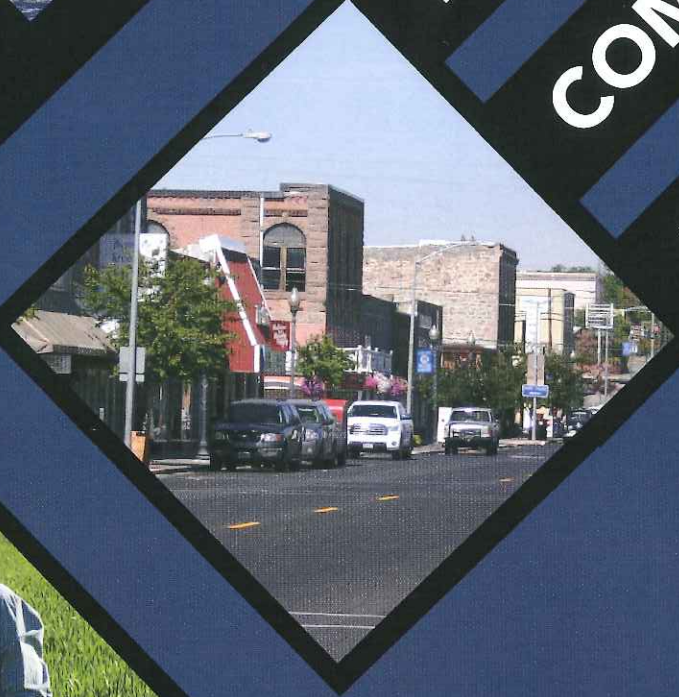




# RURAL COMMUNITIES

# EXPLORER

User Guide



**Telling Stories with Numbers**  
Helping you make good  
program, policy, community,  
and economic development decisions

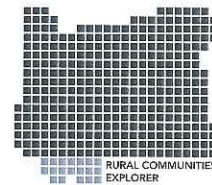




# 01 Introduction

## Contributors

The Rural Communities Explorer is a collaboration of the Oregon University System Institute for Natural Resources, the Oregon State University Libraries, the OSU Extension Service, and the OSU Rural Studies Program with funding from the Ford Family Foundation.



<http://oregonexplorer.info/rural>

The Rural Communities Explorer provides online access to demographic, environmental, social, and economic information about Oregon's rural counties and places and Siskiyou County, California.

It is a public and unbiased database, website, and teaching tool for rural leaders, engaged residents, program practitioners, and foundations that can reveal:

- The dynamics of rural communities, issues, and vitality;
- Targets for policies and programs.

# 02 Why Understand Rural Issues?

## Context Matters...

Numbers alone aren't much use to us if we don't understand how they fit together to tell a story. We have to understand the relationships among the numbers and how they reflect the community context.

In addition to data, the Rural Communities Explorer provides you a wealth of information about rural issues. Having access to research findings about rural community issues will help you interpret the data you find on the Rural Communities Explorer. This foundational information, combined with community indicators and your local knowledge, will allow you to have rich and powerful discussions about what is going on in your community and how you might shape its future.

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### Issue Briefs

Articles discussing the challenges and changes facing rural communities across America.

### Reports and Publications

Portal to the repository of research at OSU on a broad array of topics.

### What is a community? What is Rural?

How we handle what a community is and official definitions of "rural".

### Community Vitality

What "sustainability" and "quality of life" mean in real terms, on the ground.

### Community Model

A visual model that explains how community change happens.

### Experts and Local Resources

Stumped on an issue? Don't know where to look for help? Start here.

# 03 Why Use Community Data?

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## **Community measures are essential.**

Running a business without understanding your market is like shooting in the dark. Setting goals and then tracking progress without the wise use of data is like playing football without lines on the field. The current economy has increased the need to assess local conditions, and understand the effects of demographic and economic changes on the community. The Rural Communities Explorer website helps you do just that!

Knowing where the community has been and where it's headed saves leaders time and resources in establishing strategic goals and making informed decisions.

## **Why use the Rural Communities Explorer?**

### **Quick access to data:**

The Rural Communities Explorer is designed to be a one-stop-shop for community data. No more searching high and low through the internet. Get your data, and then get on with your busy day!

### **Easy to use:**

Unlike most data websites, accessing data on the Rural Communities Explorer is as simple as typing a community name or clicking on a map. Get well-organized graphs automatically with the click of a button. Getting community data could not be easier.

### **Always available:**

Pull community data on the fly! The Rural Communities Explorer is live to the internet 24 hours a day. It goes where you go, and is viewable with any device that can access the web.

### **Support:**

We're here for you! As a program through Oregon State University, we are your data partner. The Rural Communities Explorer team is available via email and telephone. Our staff can give you technical support for the database, or help you find the data you need. Want everyone on your staff to use the Rural Communities Explorer? We provide FREE onsite workshops that make working with data comfortable for everyone.

# 04 Communities Reporter Tool: Indicators

**Indicator data for every community in Oregon and Siskiyou County, California**

The Communities Reporter Tool database is a unique resource. It grants you access to data about all the villages, towns, cities, and counties in Oregon and Siskiyou County, California. No town is too small to be included in the database, and no city is too large. Data from over 30 different sources are available in the Communities Reporter Tool.

**There are over 200 indicators available in the database, covering these topics:**



Population	Food System
Age	Housing
Family Structure	Crime & Abuse
Education	Natural Resources & Amenities
Income	Economic Resources
Employment & Labor Market	Environmental Health
Migration	Community Capacity
Race & Ethnicity	Classifications
Health & Mortality	Community Documents

# 05 Communities Reporter Tool: Layout

## Easy to access data

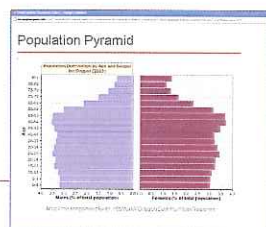
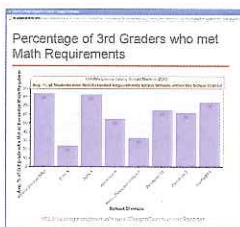
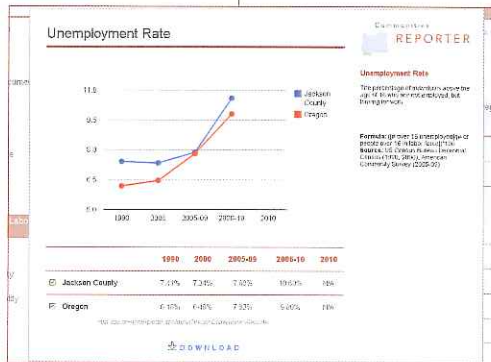
Create a report in two easy steps. Just choose communities, then decide to compare or combine them.

## Easy to understand

Data are clustered to show the information you need and to hide the rest. Each indicator is defined and sources are provided.

## Easy to see

Graphs are used to make comparing data easy, including bar charts and population pyramids. Almost all indicators have charts that show trends over time.



# 06 Communities Reporter Tool: Community Selection Steps

## ► Step 1: Select Communities

On the front page of the Communities Reporter Tool first select your community. Either type the name in the box or select the community from the map by clicking the "Select" icon and clicking the area in the map window. Once you have selected a community it should be added to the Report Queue list. You will get a report for the communities listed in the queue, and the state they're in.

## ► Step 2: Choose your Report Type

If you have selected more than one community for your report, you have the choice of comparing the statistics for these communities or combining them to get "regional" statistics. The Communities Reporter Tool is flexible. If you consider your community to be two places — Coos Bay and North Bend, for example - you can add each to your report queue, and then click the Combine button. If possible, data for both places will be combined in the regional report. It is not possible, however, to combine data for places of different geographic types (i.e. census tracts, census designated places, and counties) or for places within the same census tract.

The screenshot shows the web interface for the Communities Reporter Tool. At the top, there are navigation buttons: "Select Communities", "My Report", "Help", and "FAQs". Below this is a search bar with the text "Enter a city, county, or census tract below. Or, use the map at right." The search bar contains "Coos Bay" and an "Add to Queue" button. To the right is a map showing a geographic area with a "Select" icon and a "North Bend" label with an "Add to Queue" button. Below the search bar, a "Report Queue" section lists "1. Coos Bay (Incorporated City) Remove". A "View My Report" button is located at the bottom left of the interface. The "MAP QUERY RESULTS" section at the bottom right shows "North Bend" and "Census Tract 4, Coos County, Oregon" with "Add to Queue" buttons.

## ► Step 2: Compare or Combine

Compare data (up to 3 communities)  
 Combine data (up to 12 communities)

**Note:** You can only combine cities with cities, counties with counties, or census tracts with census tracts.

If you want to compare California communities with Oregon communities, you can only do so with a single community from each state.

## ► Step 3: Get your Data!

Click the "View My Report" button.





# 07 Communities Reporter Tool: Output

**Navigation:** The data in the Communities Reporter Tool are arranged into 17 clusters on the left side of the report page. By clicking on the individual clusters, different groups of data are displayed.

**Back to map:** You can go back to the community selection page and change the communities in your report by clicking on this link.

**Download:** You can download an .xls file of the data for the cluster you are currently viewing or for the whole report.

**Print:** You can print a hardcopy of all the data displayed. Each cluster is expanded in this output so it will be several pages long.

The screenshot shows the 'Communities Reporter' interface. At the top, there are navigation buttons: 'Back to map', 'Select Communities', 'My Report', 'Help', and 'FAQs'. Below these are 'DOWNLOAD' and 'PRINT' options. The main content area is titled 'Family Structure' and displays 'Census Bureau Data' for three locations: North Bend, Coos Bay, and Oregon. The data is presented in a table with columns for '1990' and '2006-10' for each location. A 'View data for all years' link is provided for each attribute. A 'Details' link is also present for each attribute, which is highlighted with a red arrow pointing to the 'Average Family Size (based on total population count)' row. The table includes attributes like 'Average Family Size (estimate)', 'Average Household Size (based on total population count)', and 'Percentage of Families with Children under 18 (based on total population count)'. A 'Community Documents' sidebar is visible on the left, with 'Family Structure' selected.

Census Bureau Data	North Bend Incorporated City		Coos Bay Incorporated City		Oregon		View data for all years
	1990	2006-10	1990	2006-10	1990	2006-10	
<b>Average Family Size (based on total population count)</b>	2.96	N/A	2.86	N/A	3.02	N/A	<a href="#">View data for all years</a>
<small>Details -</small>	<small>The number of members of families divided by the total number of families, where a family is a group of two or more people who reside together and who are related by birth, marriage, or adoption. Formula: (# of all people in families)/(# of families) Source: US Census Bureau, Decennial Census</small>						
<b>Average Family Size (estimate)</b>	N/A	3.01 +/- 2.18	N/A	2.93 +/- 0.14	N/A	3.01 +/- 0.01	<a href="#">View data for all years</a>
<small>Details -</small>							
<b>Average Household Size (based on total population count)</b>	2.58	N/A	2.39	N/A	2.57	N/A	<a href="#">View data for all years</a>
<small>Details -</small>							
<b>Average Household Size (estimate)</b>	N/A	2.41 +/- 2.12	N/A	2.36 +/- 0.18	N/A	2.45 +/- 0.01	<a href="#">View data for all years</a>
<small>Details -</small>							
<b>Percentage of Families with Children under 18 (based on total population count)</b>	50.78%	N/A	44.32%	N/A	47.48%	N/A	<a href="#">View data for all years</a>
<small>Details -</small>							

**Change report years:** You can change the years of data displayed in the two columns under each community by clicking on the "Change report years." The earliest year of data available is 1990.

**Details:** The "Details" link under each attribute will show you a definition, the formula used to derive the data displayed, and the source.

**Data for all years:** You can get a graph of the trend over all years of available data by clicking on the link at the right side of each attribute.

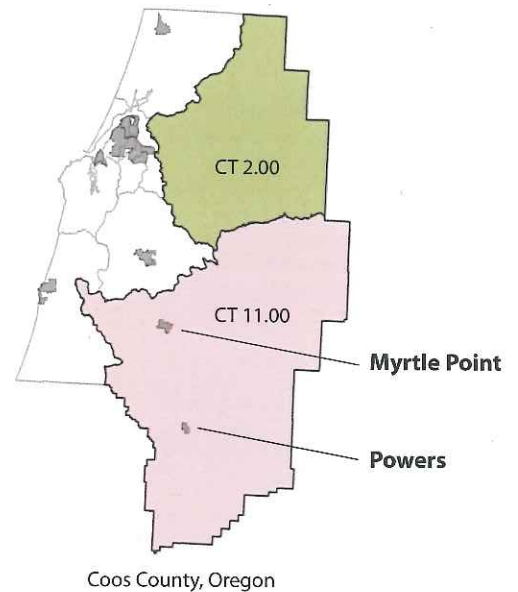
# 08 Communities Reporter Tool: Census Geography Explained

## Understanding the geographies behind economic and social data

State and federal data are most abundant at the state and county levels, and for this reason counties are often used to approximate communities. The U.S. Census Bureau is the only agency that provides a large amount of data to the public at the community level. They only do this for the decennial census (census) and the American Community Survey (ACS). Census and ACS data are available for:

- Counties
- Census tracts
- Cities
- Unincorporated towns recognized as Census Designated Places (CDP's).

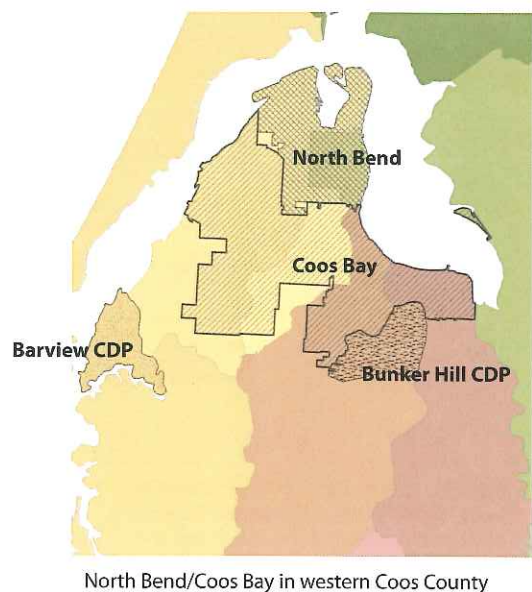
The RCE team has allocated all the unincorporated towns and villages in Oregon and Siskiyou County, CA to the census tracts and counties in which they are located. This allows you to quickly and easily generate reports in the Communities Reporter Tool for any community you want without relying on county level estimates.



### Example

Coos County, shown to the right, has 7 cities, 3 CDPs, 14 census tracts, and a total of 41 named places. Some census tracts contain one or more cities or CDPs, like Coos County CT 11.00, which has two cities shaded in gray: Myrtle Point and Powers. Other tracts may not contain entire cities or CDPs but may contain unincorporated places. Coos County CT 2.00 contains a portion of Coos Bay but also the unincorporated town of Allegany.

It is possible to “double-count” in the Communities Reporter Tool when comparing places to census tracts because the boundaries of these geographic units can overlap. In the map to the right showing western Coos County, the textured areas are places and the colored areas are census tracts. We can see that the city of Coos Bay crosses four census tracts but does not fully occupy any of them.



# 09 Telling Stories with Numbers

## Interpreting Community Profile Data

When we are trying to understand an issue in our community, we often look at data to tell us the rate of change or size of a problem. Too often, we look at just a few measures that force us to make inferences about the situation we are addressing. With the Rural Communities Explorer, whole suites of indicators can be used in concert to more fully round out the numerical side of the story. Combine this information with sociological and economic background information, and first-hand knowledge on the ground and you have a rich message that can help you secure funding, shape policy outcomes, and convey useful information to the public.

## Income Story Example

Suppose you want to understand income in your community. You should start by reading the issue brief on income and maybe looking for research on income issues in ScholarsArchive. With that foundation you can turn to the Communities Reporter Tool for a rich array of indicators for your community

Median income, income distribution, and average annual income are measures that will show you the basic trends in income. Educational attainment is related to income too, though. Looking at the percentage of your community's population with various levels of education will help you tell the story because it will shed light on why the income trends are the way they are in the community. People with higher incomes tend to have higher levels of education.

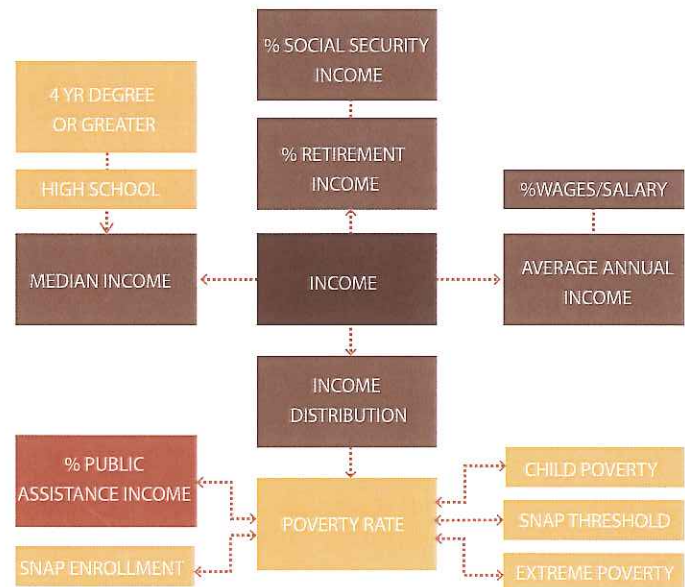
Similarly, information about the percentage of the population that earns wages or is on a fixed income will help explain the trends. People with income from wages and salary tend to earn more than those with income from other sources like Social Security or retirement.

Finally, examining statistics about people who have low incomes can provide you important insight into how many residents do not have enough resources to get by and how they utilize assistance.

Using all of these measures together, rather than just one or two, you can tell a complete story about income in your community:

- How members of your community are making ends meet
- Why some may be better off than others.
- How many may be able to afford different services
- How many may be in need of other services

Carefully interpreting statistics and drawing connections among indicators is an important part of telling your community's story with numbers.



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