



To: Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on
Transportation and Economic Development

From: Sandra Slattery, Ashland Chamber of Commerce

Date: March 3, 2021

Re: Oral testimony provided during meeting. Below is the transcript:

Co-Chair Senator Beyer, Co-Chair Representative Gomberg and members of the committee:

I am Sandra Slattery, Jackson County and Executive Director of the Ashland Chamber of Commerce.

I would like to speak in full support of the Business Oregon Technical Assistance Program having been a recipient of those grant funds.

The Ashland economy was devastated by the impacts of COVID-19. Higher education and tourism form the base of our economy and as a visitor destination for many decades, we have been particularly negatively impacted. The Oregon Shakespeare Festival did not open in 2020 nor did many of our visitor related amenities creating a dramatic decline in tourism.

Most of our businesses are very small and especially hard-hit was the specialty retail sector that is primarily women-owned. These businesses were dependent on walk-in traffic which evaporated during COVID-19. They did not have websites where they sold merchandise instead relying on the traditional, loyal, walk-in business of both locals and visitors they had depended on for decades. We had many one-on-one conversations with these owners learning of their lack of ability to sell products online. Not only did they lack the expertise but also the financial resources to create a new system in the midst of the crisis.

They are reliant on the Chamber for their support, guidance and assistance as they simply do not have the staff, expertise or funds to scale-up.

Through a technical assistance grant provided through Business Oregon, we were able to create a website for these women-owned businesses called ShopAshlandOregon.com and, for no cost to them, help them feature their business and products on the site. This included training them how to select, photograph and upload products, navigate shipping, as well as, how to better market online. We expanded a shop local program and encouraged locals, as well as visitors from our database, to utilize the site. We received extensive media coverage throughout southern Oregon but also in the Portland media heralding the site.

It was very successful and helped these businesses through online sales from the site but also to learn how to utilize technology to more successfully sell and market products. We have had over 6,000 unique visits, 29,000 page views and well over 100 purchases. While we launched this program prior to the holidays, we are continuing to grow this website and have great hopes for the future.

Without the support of this technical assistance grant, we simply could not have afforded to create this website and training for these small women-owned businesses.

Thank you for this critically important program. I encourage you to continue to fund and expand it to help vulnerable businesses survive and become more resilient in this challenging COVID-impacted climate for the future economic health of Oregon. Thank you.