

## ANALYSIS

### Department of Human Services Wildfire Smoke Preparedness

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**Analyst:** Gregory Jolivette

**Request:** Approve the submission of a federal grant application by the Department of Human Services (DHS) to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for \$2 million to support wildfire smoke preparedness in community buildings.

**Analysis:** Wildfire smoke can enter buildings and make it unhealthy to breathe indoor air. The Wildfire Smoke Preparedness in Community Buildings program, administered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, provides grants to support community wildfire smoke preparedness. Specifically, the grants can be used for the assessment, prevention, control, and/or abatement of wildfire smoke hazards in community buildings and related activities.

The grants are awarded on a competitive basis and priority will be given to projects in communities that have a demonstrated wildfire smoke risk and target public buildings or buildings that serve disadvantaged communities or vulnerable populations. The grant requires a 10% match; however, the match may be waived for applicants who commit to serving economically distressed communities. DHS has indicated it plans to seek a waiver. The application is due on May 9, 2023.

If DHS is awarded the grant, it will be used to support activities such as smoke readiness planning, outreach and training for smoke readiness, deployment of portable air cleaners, and significant improvements to buildings such as upgrades and repair of heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) units or systems and weatherization. DHS has indicated no additional staff will be needed to administer the funds.

**Legislative Fiscal Office Recommendation:** The Legislative Fiscal Office recommends approval.

## Oregon Department of Human Services Streepey

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**Request:** The Oregon Department of Human Services requests authorization to apply for a three-year grant of up to \$2,000,000 from the Environmental Protection Agency to improve public health protection against smoke from wildfires by enhancing preparedness in community buildings.

**Recommendation:** Approve the request.

**Discussion:** The Oregon Department of Human Services' (ODHS) Office of Resilience and Emergency Management (OREM) is seeking approval to apply for a three-year grant from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to improve public health protection against smoke from wildfires by enhancing preparedness in community buildings. The activities called out by the EPA in the grant notice include projects supporting smoke readiness planning, outreach and training for smoke readiness, indoor and outdoor air quality monitoring, deployment of portable air cleaners, identification and preparation of cleaner air shelters, and significant improvements to buildings, such as upgrading and repairing heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) units or systems and weatherization. The grant is competitive with an award maximum of \$2.0 million. The grant application is due on May 9, 2023, with award decisions expected by September 2023. The grant period ends on September 30, 2026.

The grant has a 10 percent cost share, a maximum of \$200,000, that can be waived if the facilities targeted by grant funds are located in economically distressed communities. ODHS intends to request a waiver of the 10 percent cost share at the time of grant application. The department intends to use all of the grant funds in economically distressed communities that fall within a census tract above the 70th percentile (i.e. compared to U.S. national percentile) for low income as defined by the EPA. Eligible applicants falling within the criteria for economically distressed communities would then be prioritized according to the following:

- Social Vulnerability Index
- Air Quality Index (AQI)
- Urban/rural/frontier classification
- Square footage of the proposed shelter
- Capacity of the proposed shelter
- Proximity to the nearest similar shelter

OREM intends to disburse funds to recipients for community building equipment and HVAC upgrades to improve indoor air quality in areas at risk from poor air quality due to wildfire smoke. The grant will support local jurisdictions to establish and operate cleaner air locations for communities throughout the state falling within economically distressed areas. ODHS anticipates the administrative work necessary to implement the grant can be completed with existing staff and does not anticipate a need for additional positions if the grant funds are received. No changes to expenditure limitation are requested at this time; however, pending outcome of the grant application, the department may return to request additional Federal Fund expenditure limitation.



# Oregon

Tina Kotek, Governor

## Department of Human Services

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April 24, 2023

Senator Elizabeth Steiner, Co-Chair  
Representative Tawna Sanchez, Co-Chair  
Joint Committee on Ways and Means  
900 Court St. NE  
H-178 State Capitol  
Salem OR 97301

RE: EPA Wildfire Smoke Preparedness in Community Buildings Grant EPA-OAR-  
ORIA-23-04

Dear Co-Chairpersons:

### **Nature of the Request**

The Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) Office of Resilience and Emergency Management (OREM) requests permission to apply for the funding opportunity “Wildfire Smoke Preparedness in Community Buildings.” The total amount sought is \$2,000,000 to be used to improve public health protection against smoke from wildfires by enhancing preparedness in community buildings. This funding opportunity does have a 10% cost share requirement that can be waived. The application due date is May 9, 2023. This opportunity became available on March 22, 2023.

### **Background**

This Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) grant would support the work of ODHS because ODHS is responsible to support warming and cooling shelters throughout Oregon according to ORS 431A.410 and 431A.412.

Since ODHS is designated as lead state agency for clean air shelter operations by [ORS 431A.410](#), this EPA grant opportunity is an opportunity to leverage federal funds to execute an existing state program. ODHS will be able to broaden its efforts to make communities more resilient to wildfire smoke in collaboration with OHA, ODOE, and Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (ODEQ) through this EPA grant.

Furthermore, SB 80 (2023 Regular Session) has the potential to increase the pool of eligibility for the SB 762 (2021 Regular Session) grant applicants by adding community-based organizations and faith-based organizations to the types of eligible candidates.

*“Assisting People to Become Independent, Healthy and Safe”*

The funds under this Notice of Funding Opportunity will be used to support projects through activities such as:

- smoke readiness planning
- outreach and training for smoke readiness
- indoor and outdoor air quality monitoring
- deployment of portable air cleaners
- identification and preparation of cleaner air shelters
- significant improvements to buildings such as upgrading and repairing heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) units or systems and weatherization

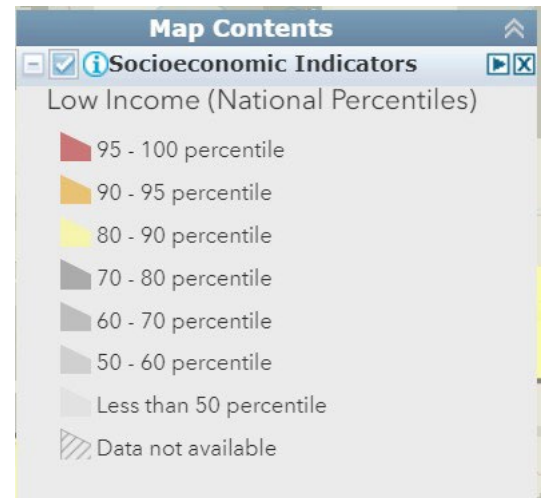
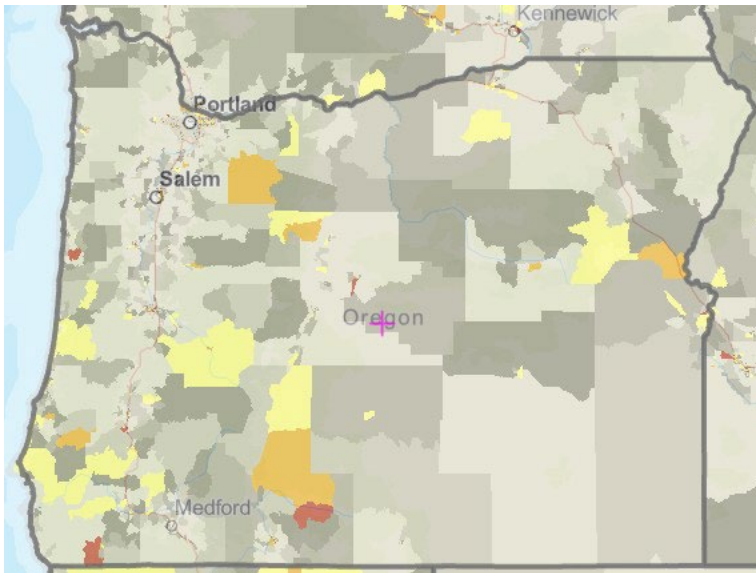
Although this grant specifically calls out air quality, it encourages projects that addresses multiple hazards that may be concurrent with wildfire smoke (e.g., extreme heat, power outages, airborne infectious disease outbreaks such as COVID-19), and how the project improves overall capacity to comprehensively address indoor air quality issues.

This grant could support local jurisdictions to establish and operate cleaner air locations. It would allow more funding to be distributed to low-income and disadvantaged communities and vulnerable populations. Additionally, these grant dollars could be available to buildings that are open to the public but may be operated/owned by a non-profit or private business.

ODHS has established an equity framework to inform the prioritization of grant awards. The first requirement for an eligible applicant will be that the applicant is located within the EPA's Environmental Justice Screen map ([EJSCREEN](#)) and is designated at or above 70% of low income of the national average as indicated under the Socioeconomic Indicators layer on the map. Then eligible applicants will be prioritized by a scoring calculation based on the following data points:

- Air Quality Index (AQI)
- Social Vulnerability Index
- Urban/rural/frontier classification
- Square footage of the proposed shelter
- Capacity of the proposed shelter
- Proximity to the nearest similar shelter

When applying for the grant, ODHS will request a grantor to waive the 10% cost share by targeting grantees in economically distressed communities with census tract above the 70th percentile (national percentiles, i.e. compared to US) for low income as defined by the [EJSCREEN](#) data as provided by the EPA (sample below).



The grant is scheduled to begin October 1, 2023 (funding released in September 2023) and will need to be concluded by September 30, 2026. The current staffing level is sufficient to administering the grant.

### Agency Request

The Oregon Department of Human Services Office of Resilience and Emergency Management requests permission to apply for \$2,000,000 for the Wildfire Smoke Preparedness in Community Buildings Grant.

### Legislation Affected

None

If you have questions, please contact Rob Kodiriy at 503-689-7554.

Sincerely,

Fariborz Pakseresht, ODHS Director

ec: Amanda Beitel, Legislative Fiscal Office  
Gregory Jolivette, Legislative Fiscal Office  
Kate Nass, Department of Administrative Services  
Mike Streepey, Department of Administrative Services