

State recruits teens to spend \$1 million in federal recovery funds

By LYNNE TERRY
Oregon Capital Chronicle

SALEM — The Oregon Health Authority is recruiting teenagers for an advisory council that will decide how to spend \$1 million in COVID-recovery funds.

The agency wants the money to help alleviate some of the impacts of the pandemic on young people, who suffered socially, intellectually and emotionally from switching to online learning and curtailing their social interactions and activities. The health authority said young people are the best ones to decide how those funds should be spent.

“I think young people are really suffering, and it’s important that we as adults understand what they want and what recovery looks like to them,” Lev Schneidman, the agency’s recovery school health program coordinator, said in a statement. “We can make all these decisions about how the money is spent, but ultimately we have to ask, ‘Do the young people want it?’ We are of the belief that people should have a say (in) what their health and wellness looks like, but we often forget young people in that.”

The agency is seeking 20 teenagers between 15 and 19 to apply by Thursday, March 31. They have to agree to dedicate five hours a month to the council, including attending a two-hour monthly meeting and two four-hour retreats.

There are no other requirements or qualifications needed to land a spot on the Youth Advisory Council.

“We want a diverse group of young people from all around the state who are excited to engage in this process with us,” said Erica Heartquist, a spokesperson for the agency.

This is the agency’s latest committee to include people with experience in the subject. Past results have been mixed. A year ago, the agency convened a committee that aimed to reduce inequities. The Oregon Vaccine Advisory Committee included advocates for racial and ethnic minorities. Its task was to set priority groups for the COVID-19 vaccine rollout. After three meetings, the agency’s public health director, Rachael Banks, rejected their recommendations and said they could not, by law, prioritize groups based on race and ethnicity.

The state also has an oversight committee that is in charge of spending millions of

MORE INFORMATION

Interested teens can go online to apply. Besides contact information, the form asks for statements about the “lived experiences, identities, perspectives, skills and/or knowledge” the applicant would bring to the council, how COVID has affected youth and how the council could help stem health inequities.

dollars related to drug addiction following the passage in 2020 of Measure 110, which decriminalized drug possession. The measure specified the oversight committee needed to include members with experience with addiction. Critics say the committee is struggling because it lacks agency leadership.

For the youth council, the agency has not publicly specified who will choose the final council members or what qualifications they will look for. Heartquist said the agency is “assembling a group of OHA staff from different departments to help select the candidates and then we will conduct interviews with the help of some more staff members.”

Besides the teens, the council will include three adults, including at least one facilitator and staff from the agency’s Public Health Division.

“We are contracting with very skilled facilitators who have extensive experience with policy work who will guide the process,” Heartquist said.

The group will have wide leeway in how they spend the money in schools. It must be used for wages or personnel support, including training, certification and licensure. In terms of guidelines, Heartquist said the agency’s priorities include:

- Enhancing culturally and linguistically specific services in schools.
- Developing youth leadership.
- Mental health and behavioral health care.
- Providing livable wages to unlicensed staff.

The council will define values for recovery, discuss youth needs and health inequities and talk about community engagement. Members will be paid \$45 an hour for the time they spend on council activities, or get credit for community service, if they prefer.

Oregon seeks input on wildfire recovery funds

By JULIA SHUMWAY
Oregon Capital Chronicle

SALEM — State officials are asking Oregonians to weigh in on how the state should spend millions in federal wildfire recovery money.

More than 4,000 Oregon homes were destroyed by severe wildfires in 2020, according to the state Office of Emergency Management. Much of the \$422 million federal grant from the U.S. Housing and Urban Development department will be used to replace lost homes, but the state can also use some of the money to repair or rebuild public infrastructure or to rebuild the local economy.

The Oregon Housing and Community Services Department is running an online survey seeking input on how to spend the money. Oregonians will also be able to share feedback on the eventual plan in May.


Alex Campbell, chief external affairs officer for

Recovery and Resiliency at the department, said in a statement that state employees are especially interested in hearing from older Oregonians, Latinos and people with disabilities who have specific housing needs.

“We are looking for public input, because it’s the right thing to do,” he said. “It’s the ‘Oregon Way,’ and we know it will make the plan better.”

The federal funding follows \$150 million that the state Legislature allocated in 2021 for housing in the counties most affected by the 2020 fires. Jackson County, in particular, lost more than 2,300 homes, most of which were manufactured homes in 18 mobile home parks destroyed by the Alameda fire.

About 280 studio apartments are set to open in Jackson County by June, according to the Housing and Community Services Department. Another 687 affordable homes in Douglas, Jackson, Klamath and Lane counties will begin housing people by the end of the year.

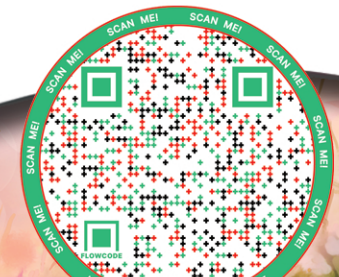


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