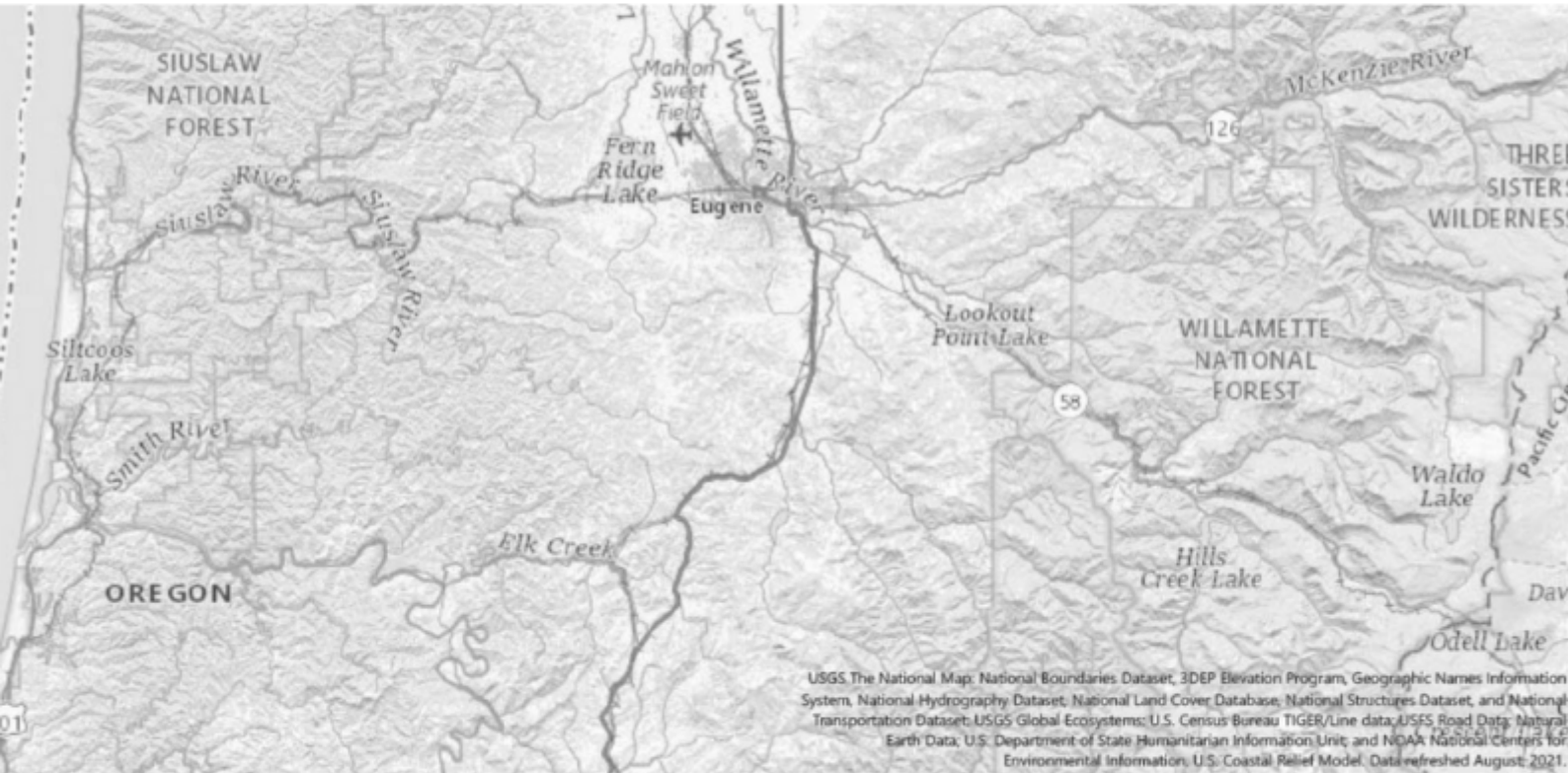


PROFILING LANE COUNTY SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

A Benchmarking Project of the Institute for Networked Communities



LANE COUNTY SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

By: Francie Genz, INC

This case study is one in a series of Next Generation Sector Partnerships profiles from across the country. Its primary purpose is to give practitioners insights into the key milestones and critical ingredients for success to-date that have shaped the journey of the Lane County Sector Team in building five industry-driven sector partnerships. Its intended audience is the diverse mix of business, education, workforce development, and economic development leaders who are committed to the work of taking their communities to a new level of shared prosperity. The profile is organized into six sections: motivations for launch, mechanisms for change, moments of transformation, measurable results, major ingredients for success, and the future of Lane County partnerships moving forward.

WHAT'S INSIDE:

- *About Lane County Sector Partnerships*
- *Motivations for Launch*
- *Mechanisms for Change*
- *Moments of Transformation*
- *Measurable Results*
- *Ingredients for Success*
- *Future of the Partnership*



ABOUT LANE COUNTY SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

Lane County, Oregon sits in the Willamette Valley, stretching from the Coast all the way to the Cascade Mountains. Lane County is the same geographic size of the State of Connecticut with a population of about 400,000 people. Traditionally driven by the timber and agriculture industries, Lane County's economy has diversified into a robust mix of high tech, manufacturing, creative industries, health care and biosciences, construction as well as wood products. But these shifts didn't happen on their own. Since 2015, Lane County has been purposefully activating networks of business leaders and public partners to support the driving industry sectors that are most important to the region's economy. They have invested in the region's collaborative capacity, building five Next Gen Sector Partnerships and creating a sustainable infrastructure to support each of them.

The region is currently home to five active sector partnerships in technology, food and beverage manufacturing, creative industries, construction aggregate, and wood products. While each sector partnership is unique and tailored to the needs of its targeted industry, they all use the same model. They are industry-led and community-supported, serving as a platform for collaborative action to strengthen the targeted sector. Each partnership is supported by a Sector Strategist who facilitates partnership activities. These strategists work for different organizations—industry associations, the workforce development board, or other community-based groups—but they share a common approach. They connect business leaders to one another, elevate their collective voice and help organize public partners to meet their needs for the greater good of the industry and the community.

Lane Workforce Partnership supports all five partnerships, ensuring they have what they need to be successful, cross-pollinating innovations across partnerships, and keeping each partnership grounded in a consistent vision and model. Lane Workforce Partnership also convenes the Community Collaborative, a monthly gathering of Sector Strategists and other public partners from the region's education, workforce, and economic development systems. These meetings are an opportunity to discuss priorities and needs from each sector, determine what's needed and enlist support in driving toward solutions.



"Before we were disparate, disconnected and withdrawn. We became a community because of this."

-TODD EDMAN, CO-FOUNDER, BITCORK, TECH SECTOR PARTNERSHIP CHAMPION



MOTIVATIONS FOR LAUNCH: A NEW KIND OF COLLABORATION

When the State of Oregon introduced the Next Gen Sector Partnership model in 2014, sector partnerships weren't new to Lane County. There was a long history of bringing businesses together to understand their common workforce needs and respond with sector-based training. But bringing partners together from economic development, Chambers of Commerce, industry associations, educators, and workforce developers to holistically support targeted industries—this was a new level of collaboration.

The team analyzed regional labor market data to help answer the question, "Which industry sector needs our collective support and has the most good-paying jobs?" A small but growing tech industry stood out. It was a sector with potential but without deep roots in the region. Halfway between Seattle and Silicon Valley, Lane County had potential to be a tech hub. But, after speaking with tech sector leaders, it was clear that there was very little keeping them in the region. Without a strong tech talent pipeline, high-speed internet connectivity, or direct flights to major cities, tech companies could easily uproot and move elsewhere.

Fast forward to today, none of the companies interviewed in those early days have left the region. Instead, they have put down roots and built the ecosystem needed to grow and sustain the industry in Lane County through the Tech Sector Partnership.

The Tech Sector Partnership was the first to launch using the Next Gen model. It demonstrated what was possible when the right people come together with a shared goal. Within six months, Eugene had a direct flight to San Jose, connecting Lane County to Silicon Valley. High speed internet rolled out in the corridor within nine months. The University of Oregon changed their entire computer science curriculum; whereas tech companies had complained about the dearth of local tech talent, two years later they were vying to hire graduates. These tangible, high-impact achievements gave the group traction, momentum and inspired the region to launch four additional partnerships using the same model.

MECHANISMS FOR CHANGE: BUILDING TRUST AND SHARED GOALS

None of Lane County's five sector partnerships started from a blank slate. In every industry, there were a range of efforts underway run by community colleges, industry associations, Chambers of Commerce and others. That's why it was critical to be clear from the outset about what these partnerships are and are not. They are a tool to organize around collective goals, not a new program or initiative. They are a platform to leverage work underway, not a replacement for existing efforts. They are a mechanism to connect business leaders to one another and to the public sector, not an isolated strategy. As Mitra Gruwell, champion of the creative industries sector partnership said, "It's not about competition, it's about amplification. We are amplifiers of other work other organizations are doing and we fill in the gaps. There's a place for everyone to contribute."



This vision required creating a formal mechanism to connect partners and solve problems collaboratively. Lane Workforce Partnership established the Lane County Sector Strategy Team as a platform to connect partners and industry champions. This group met quarterly with over 40 people in attendance including Strategists from each sector partnership, local economic developers, City and County leaders, workforce development and community colleges. It provided a platform to help the regional team solve problems, build relationships and trust, and report out on accomplishments of each of its sector partnerships. The Sector Strategy Team had its own brand and identity reflecting the many partners who contribute to sector partnership successes. This allowed them to share credit for partnership wins and reinforce a sense of shared ownership.

Through the COVID-19 pandemic, when meeting in large groups became difficult, the Sector Strategy Team evolved into a smaller "Community Collaborative." It brought together key partners from the region's economic and workforce development organizations along with each of the Sector Strategists, providing a regular forum to keep partners connected and aligned through the pandemic. The meetings provide an opportunity to share about efforts underway and, more importantly, to identify synergies and potential for collaboration.

The Lane County team has also been intentional about staffing sector partnerships, balancing the need for consistent, high-quality staffing with the need for shared ownership and investment. The team strives to provide each partnership with a dedicated staff person—or Strategist—responsible for facilitating partnership activities and engaging business leaders and public partners. They have been careful to ensure that Strategists bring the right skill set, focused on relationship-building, motivating others, delegating, and driving progress without prescribing the agenda. Strategists are employed by different organizations but funding for their positions is a collaborative effort. In the first two years, Strategists are supported by public funds from the workforce board and other public partners with the expectation that financial support transitions to industry in the third year. This ensures that no single partner shoulder the load of supporting a partnership independently.

The food and beverage sector partnership, for example, initially relied on a contracted Strategist to support the partnership. After two years, the partnership evolved into Eugene's Table, an association with dues-paying members and community partners that is financially sustainable. Micah Elconin, the Food and Beverage Industry Strategist describes his role as, "The [industry's] biggest fan, the catalyst, the instigator."



"It's not about report outs. It's about action. It's, 'Here are the things I'm working on. Who can support and where?'. "
- ASHLEY ESPINOZA, DIRECTOR OF SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS, LANE COUNTY WORKFORCE PARTNERSHIP





MOMENTS OF TRANSFORMATION: A COMMITMENT TO GETTING THINGS DONE

When the first Next Gen Sector Partnership launched in the tech sector, there was healthy skepticism among both business leaders and public partners that this would be different. They had been part of convenings and county-wide initiatives before, many of which fizzled out over time. Kristina Payne, Director of Lane Workforce Partnership, insisted this would be different. First and foremost, it would be about getting things done. And it would be a team effort.

Payne enlisted the support of Todd Edman, CEO at the time Lunar Logic, who championed the tech sector partnership in the early days. Todd called his peers in the industry to invite them to the launch meeting and said, "This will be different. We will get things done. And if we don't see outcomes, I promise I will never ask you to come to another meeting again."

With that call to action and a commitment to working differently, the team did achieve outcomes. But, crucially, those wins were reported as collaborative achievements. The direct flight to San Jose? The Chamber played a critical role in negotiating that. Installation of fiber in downtown Eugene? The Council of Governments led that effort.



"We didn't stand up and go, 'Look what we've done for you.' We pointed out all the people who helped. This is *your thing*. That's why it's different -- and better -- than how we've worked before."

**-KRISTINA PAYNE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
LANE WORKFORCE PARTNERSHIP**



MEASURABLE RESULTS: SHARING SUCCESS

Lane County has made a concerted effort to document and track results from each sector partnership as well as from collaborative, cross-sector efforts that emerged from individual sector partnerships. Sharing these successes helps to reinforce a sense of momentum and strengthen commitment to leveraging partnerships as vehicles for accomplishing big, community-wide goals.

Results include:

- The Construction Aggregate partnership helped to create a new Trades Skills Fundamentals curriculum that introduces basic construction concepts in ten accredited modules. The curriculum has been adopted by all 16 Lane County School Districts as well as Lane Community College as the construction starter course.
- In 2021, the Tech Sector Partnership, together with Lane Workforce Partnership, launched a six-week cultural intelligence workshop focused on unconscious bias, inclusive leadership, and developing cultural intelligence in the workplace. While this effort was initiated within the tech sector, it ultimately engaged HR directors and others with hiring authority across a variety of sectors in Lane County. After a successful first cohort, registration is now open for a second group. The goal is to build a critical mass of HR professionals and hiring managers committed to pushing for changes in hiring practices in a systematic way. The partnership is exploring establishing a People Community that would drive these offerings, developing innovative solutions to push for more diverse, inclusive workplaces.
- The Tech Sector Partnership forged strategic partnerships with the University of Oregon for industry-led experiential learning, internships, networking and events to build a strong local talent pipeline into the tech industry. It has also held annual Hackathons for civic good ("Hack for a Cause" and "Sprint4Oregon") since 2015.
- Through the Construction Aggregate partnership, eight Lane County construction companies along with McKenzie School District students worked together to build fifteen sheds to replace structures destroyed in the Holiday Farm Fire. Each of the participating companies volunteered crews to work side by side with the students to offer mentoring and support as they learned valuable construction skills.
- The Food and Beverage Manufacturing Partnership has raised the profile of the industry through events that showcase local food and beverage companies. Eugene now hosts Startup Weekend Food, the first event of its kind on the West Coast. Eugene is also now home to two national wine conferences: the Wine Marketing & Tourism Conference and the Wine Media Conference.

MEASURABLE RESULTS: CONTINUED

- The Food and Beverage Manufacturing Partnership has helped build relevant education and training programs in the region; Lundquist College of Business launched undergraduate and graduate level Business of Food course and the University of Oregon Food Studies Program started to offer an undergraduate minor and graduate-level certificate. The Partnership also launched the first Growing People program in Lane county, training 11 professionals from seven food and beverage manufacturing companies who are aspiring industry leaders.
- In the initial weeks and months of the COVID-19 pandemic, many of the largest sectors in the region laid off workers just as wood products experienced a surge in demand and workforce needs. The Wood Products Partnership mobilized to identify dislocated workers in industries affected by the pandemic and connected candidates to opportunities in wood products.
- All five sector partnerships shared a goal of elevating the profile of their industry in Lane County. They came together to develop a marketing campaign in the Eugene airport, showcasing the World Class Industries in Eugene. This campaign shined a high-profile light on Lane County's industry sectors, job opportunities in those industries, as well as the connections to the local community.
- The Creative Sector Partnership has shined a light on an industry that can sometimes fly below the radar. By defining the industry and quantifying its impact on the region, the partnership has helped to elevate the importance of creative industries to the region and the economy. They have also gained a more comprehensive understanding of artists' needs by collaborating with multiple arts organizations to launch a collaborative artists survey. The survey was distributed using pre-existing networks of each supporting organization. Within six weeks, they had over 70 respondents—a level that no organization had been able to achieve independently—and a much better handle on what artists needed. After publishing the results, arts organizations used it as the basis for their programming going forward, aligning with artists' needs.

MAJOR INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESS: BUILDING MORALE, BUILDING TRUST

While each Sector Partnership is led by teams of champions and supported by a Strategist, Lane Workforce Partnership plays a critical role in supporting all five partnerships. The Sector Strategy Director plays an especially important role in facilitating collaboration and driving toward progress and results. Ashley Espinoza, who has held this role since 2018, regularly convenes the Strategists to share what they're learning, troubleshoot together, and explore opportunities to collaborate across sectors. She also facilitates the Community Collaborative meetings, bringing public partners together to share resources and helping to facilitate connections across organizations or systems. "I don't lead anything," Espinoza says. "I make sure everyone is equipped with what they need to do the work they know best how to do."

Espinoza understands that the single most important factor in getting groups of people to work together is trust. When a group has the experience of accomplishing something tangible together, they develop confidence in one another. Trust builds, and so does their capacity to solve big problems together. In contrast, nothing erodes trust like failure to deliver on a commitment. Espinoza's role is a backstop for the regional team. She helps ensure that partners follow through on commitments so that the group moves forward. "When someone says, 'I'll do this,' I reach out to make sure they're supported, and they have what they need so they don't under-perform. That way, they build confidence in themselves and the team."

Espinoza also plays an important role in reinforcing the norms and values behind effective sector partnerships. She helps emphasize the importance of keeping the voice of industry at the fore, engaging partners collaboratively and sharing credit. She also helps keep the focus on the big picture: a stronger community.

Ultimately it's these shared values that underpin Lane County's success. The team has been purposeful about finding the right "civic entrepreneurs" to drive sector partnerships. Whether they work for an industry association, a public entity or a community-based organization, the focus is on prioritizing the health of the sector and the community first. "We're trying to get away from the attitude that you either fit or you don't. It's not about the structure or the organization you represent. It's the attitude you bring and the way you show up that's the deciding factor," says Espinoza.

LOOKING FORWARD: SUSTAINING & LAUNCHING NEW PARTNERSHIPS IN NEW SECTORS

With five partnerships up and running, Lane County had learned what it takes to build a sustainable infrastructure that supports each sector's unique needs while leveraging synergies across them. They have plans to launch additional partnerships, targeting four additional industry sectors critical to their region's economy: biosciences, health care, advanced manufacturing, and transportation, distribution and logistics. They also hope to further bolster the region's collaborative capacity, investing in the systems that will help them sustain each partnership while realizing synergies across them.

Lane County continues to pave new ground in defining what it takes to sustain multiple partnerships targeting most—or all—of the driving sectors of the regional economy. They will continue to balance the need to customize their approach to the unique needs of each sector while staying true to a core set of values that are shared across the board: industry leadership, community support, and a commitment to getting things done, collaboratively.



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