

Southern Willamette Valley Innovation Corridor: Breakout Session Summary

Thank you for joining the Southern Willamette Valley Innovation Corridor breakout session at the 2024 Oregon Business Plan Leadership Summit. Below is a brief summary of the broader issues discussed and the feedback provided online.

Overview:

The session focused on advancing the Southern Willamette Valley as an innovation-driven economic powerhouse and specifically how the University of Oregon and Oregon State University can contribute. General themes included fostering increased collaboration and communication going forward, improving talent retention in Oregon, as well as more specific institutional improvements in a few different areas.

Strengths and unique economic advantages of the Southern Willamette Valley:

Participants agreed that the Southern Willamette Valley has several unique advantages, including top-tier research and educational institutions that provide a strong talent pool and translate innovation into products and services, available land for development, and a diverse economy. The benefits of significant federal funding in the region and the natural beauty that attracts people to the region both as tourists and residents were also discussed.

Opportunities for the region that can be expanded upon:

Participants noted opportunities to build on existing industries, such as tourism and semiconductors, and to improve the retention of technology-focused companies in the region. They also mentioned the potential for improving our tourism industries, retaining educated talent locally, and promoting broader inclusion of rural communities in economic development.

Issues that need to be addressed to promote economic growth:

A major issue discussed was efficiency, with many participants expressing frustration over duplicative efforts to drive economic development, the availability of move-in ready buildings, land use challenges, and regulations and taxes that they said were inhibiting business growth in the region. Also mentioned was that a major bottleneck for workforce growth is the lack of amenities needed to allow people to move to the region, including affordable housing, childcare, a diverse job market, and school quality.

Where the universities are aligning research and education development with the needs of industry effectively:

Participants found that the UO was effectively aligning much of its research with the needs of industry, with the TallWood Design Institute and Knight Campus receiving particular acclaim. Participants familiar with OSU's Advantage Accelerator and Huang Collaborative Innovation Complex also highlighted them as strong examples of OSU's alignment with industry needs.

However, most participants weren't as familiar with the universities' alignment with industry needs or didn't have direct experience working with the universities.

What the universities can do to promote innovation and economic growth:

One of the common threads throughout the session was the desire for more investment and communication with the business community throughout Oregon. Some common suggestions included funneling graduates to local industries, better implementing spin-out processes, having more hooks on technological development to keep the economic benefits local, making industry experts more aware of the programs we are doing by attending relevant conferences, and doing more STEM introductions with local K-12 schools to push students towards UO and OSU.

Next Steps:

Oregon State University and the University of Oregon have each launched an economic development road-mapping process to explore how our respective universities can better support economic growth in the region. We are also sharing this summary with the Oregon Business Council to inform future convenings. Additional next steps are forthcoming.

Thank you again for your participation and valuable insights. We look forward to continuing this important work together to advance the Southern Willamette Valley as a hub for innovation and economic growth.

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