

Meeting Notes: Washington-Oregon Community Networking Group

Date: June 15, 2026

Meeting Type: Virtual Networking & Business Opportunity Meeting

Facilitators: Ryan Taylor (Golden Gift Consulting), Cedric Austin (DES)

Guest Contributors & Advisors: Barbara Alexander-Brown (IBR), George Frost (GW Frost & Associates, Veronica Ybarra,

Meeting Length: Approximately 1 hour

Number of Attendees: 32

Agenda Overview

Ryan Taylor welcomed participants to the second Washington-Oregon Community Networking Group meeting and reviewed the purpose of the group: to provide a safe space for small businesses, agencies, and organizational representatives to share information, build relationships, and learn about business opportunities in Washington and Oregon. The meeting included:

- Business opportunity updates
- Interstate Bridge Replacement (IBR) Program updates
- Washington and Oregon events and training opportunities
- Facilitated networking focused on recent wins and business growth
- Resource sharing and peer learning

George Frost noted he would be participating in a limited capacity due to travel commitments.

Business Opportunity Updates

Interstate Bridge Replacement (IBR) Program

Ryan Taylor opened with updates on the Interstate Bridge Replacement Program, an approximately \$8 billion bi-state project connecting Washington and Oregon.

Upcoming IBR Opportunities & Events

Participants were informed about several upcoming opportunities to engage with the project:

- Virtual drop-in sessions:
 - July 23, 2026
 - August 11, 2026
- Regional Contracting Forum participation
- Future APEX and NAMC-related outreach events
- Upcoming voluntary submitters meeting (date to be announced)

Barbara Alexander-Brown clarified her role as Economic Opportunities and Compliance Specialist for the IBR Program and highlighted the extensive collaboration among WSDOT, ODOT, TriMet, C-TRAN, and other partner agencies.

Vendor Portal & Communications

Barbara emphasized the importance of:

- Registering in the IBR Vendor Portal
- Uploading capability statements and qualifications
- Following project newsletters and updates
- Using the Vendor Portal as the primary source for the most current procurement information

She also discussed efforts to improve coordination between project communications, contracting information, and vendor outreach resources.

DES and WSDOT Contracting Opportunities

Ryan highlighted several procurement resources and opportunities including:

- DES forecasted procurements and statewide contracts
- WSDOT engineering and design opportunities
- WSDOT IT goods and services opportunities
- State Route 167 project-related contracting opportunities

Participants were encouraged to monitor DES and WSDOT procurement websites for upcoming solicitations.

Parks Tacoma Community Connections Funding

Ryan shared information regarding Parks Tacoma's Community Connections Program.

Key details:

- Funding available for community-based events and outreach programs
- Awards of up to \$7,000 per event
- Applications due June 30, 2026
- Events would be hosted in partnership with Tacoma Parks facilities

Discussion included questions regarding venue costs and proposal requirements. Ryan noted that proposals require:

- Organizational summary
- Event/program description
- Budget
- Key staff and volunteer qualifications

Participants were encouraged to review the solicitation quickly due to the approaching deadline.

Skanska Contracting Opportunities

Ryan briefly presented two Skanska school construction opportunities in Vancouver.

Discussion included:

- Bid packages currently available
- Contact information for project representatives
- Upcoming bid deadlines
- Availability of project documents through Skanska procurement channels

Participants were advised to review solicitation materials as soon as possible due to time-sensitive deadlines.

Events & Training Opportunities

DES and Community Events

Cedric Austin provided updates on upcoming business and contracting events.

Upcoming Events

- Northwest Mountain Minority Supplier Development Council Business Conference (July 8)
- Association of Washington Business Economic Future Summit (July 16)
- Tabor 100 Small Business Showcase (July 25)
- Initiative Black Conference (August)
- Washington African American Chamber of Commerce Business Brunch Expo (August 29)
- Women in Business Conference (August 29)

Cedric encouraged organizations to share additional events for inclusion in future presentations.

Regional Contracting Forums

Cedric, Barbara, and Yolanda Brooks discussed upcoming contracting forums.

Central Regional Contracting Forum

- September 3, 2026
- Yakima Convention Center

Regional Contracting Forum

- October 7, 2026
- Muckleshoot Casino

Discussion included:

- Sponsorship opportunities
- Exhibitor opportunities
- Connections with agencies, primes, and resource partners
- Increased outreach to Central Washington businesses

Yolanda explained that the Regional Contracting Forum rotates leadership among agencies including OMWBE, DES, WSDOT, King County, and the City of Seattle. She also noted that the Central Regional Contracting Forum was created to better serve businesses in Central Washington.

Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT)

Omar Alvarado, Small Business Programs Navigator with ODOT, shared information about upcoming ODOT training opportunities.

ODOT Procurement & Certification Training

- June 18, 2026
- Focus on ODOT procurement practices
- Small business certification requirements
- Prequalification processes
- Available in English and Spanish

Omar noted that the training was developed in response to direct feedback from businesses seeking more ODOT-specific guidance.

Facilitated Networking Discussion

Topic: Recent Wins and What Businesses Need to Reach the Next Level.

Capability Statement Strategy & Business Development

Monica Colgan (Launch Industries)

Monica shared a recent success involving the redesign of her company's capability statements.

Key takeaways:

- Created multiple industry-specific capability statements instead of one general version.
- Developed targeted materials for:
 - Marketing services
 - Technical assistance programs
 - IT services
 - Other specialized offerings
- Successfully used these materials at the Seattle Reverse Vendor Trade Show.
- Resulted in productive conversations and follow-up discussions with multiple agencies.

The discussion highlighted the value of tailoring marketing materials to specific audiences and procurement opportunities.

Strategic Outreach & Market Research

Cedric Austin (DES)

Cedric described several recent successes involving businesses that implemented targeted outreach strategies.

Lessons learned:

- Conduct research before attending events.
- Identify specific agencies and decision-makers.
- Focus on quality interactions rather than attending every event.
- Use capability statements strategically.
- Build long-term relationships.

Cedric reported that businesses applying these methods have experienced stronger results while reducing time and travel costs associated with networking activities.

Building Brand Recognition

Barbara Alexander-Brown (IBR)

Barbara shared reflections following the recent IBR Industry Day event.

Key observations:

- Visibility and relationship-building are performance measures in themselves.
- Businesses should invest time in:
 - LinkedIn
 - Facebook
 - Professional networking platforms
 - Consistent brand promotion

Barbara emphasized that brand recognition often influences procurement decisions and that businesses may be leaving opportunities on the table if they are not actively promoting their work and expertise.

Specialized HR & Compliance Services

Andrea Diaz (Dominica HR Consulting)

Andrea introduced her Seattle-based HR consulting and workforce strategy firm.

Recent success:

- Assisted a multi-state healthcare organization with leave management compliance, documentation processes, and litigation support.
- Developed defensible documentation and compliance systems to reduce organizational risk.

Andrea discussed challenges associated with communicating highly specialized HR compliance services and noted that Monica's capability statement approach provided valuable ideas for future outreach efforts.

ODOT Small Business Outreach Success

Omar Alvarado (ODOT)

Omar identified a recent win as ODOT's ability to respond directly to business feedback by creating procurement and certification training tailored to small businesses.

He emphasized the importance of:

- Listening to business needs
 - Delivering practical training
 - Providing resources in multiple languages
 - Supporting long-term business success rather than one-time engagement
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Sigma Consulting Group Growth

Venky Ramakrishnan (Sigma Consulting Group)

Venky shared several recent accomplishments, including:

- Winning contracts with the City of Portland
- Expanding work at Portland International Airport
- Growing operations in both Oregon and Washington

Venky also discussed:

- Staff augmentation services
- Project and program management work
- The growing importance of artificial intelligence tools in proposal development and business operations

He encouraged businesses to remain adaptable and continue learning new technologies.

Golden Gift Consulting

Ryan Taylor

Ryan shared that Golden Gift Consulting recently supported the Washington State Office of Equity in developing the State Vendor Toolkit.

The project has generated interest from additional agencies seeking similar resources and highlights increasing demand for small-business-focused procurement and outreach tools.

Key Themes & Discussion Highlights

Recurring themes throughout the meeting included:

- Tailoring capability statements to specific audiences and opportunities
 - Using market research to improve networking effectiveness
 - Building strong professional relationships over time
 - Increasing visibility through branding and online presence
 - Responding directly to business feedback when developing programs and trainings
 - Leveraging AI and technology to improve proposal development and operations
 - Continuing collaboration between Washington and Oregon agencies, businesses, and resource partners
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Follow-Up & Next Steps

Participants were encouraged to:

- Register in the IBR Vendor Portal
- Attend upcoming ODOT and IBR trainings
- Participate in Regional Contracting Forums
- Review Parks Tacoma funding opportunities before the June 30 deadline
- Continue refining capability statements and outreach strategies
- Share business growth needs and resource gaps with facilitators for future programming

Barbara Alexander-Brown suggested that participants submit in the chat what they need to reach the next level of growth so organizers can better identify resource gaps and future discussion topics.

Upcoming Meeting

The next Washington-Oregon Community Networking Group meeting will be held:

- **July 20, 2026**
- **12:00 p.m.**
- **Microsoft Teams**