

Working for a Prosperous and Sustainable Future in Rural WA

Partners for Rural Washington (PRWA) is a nonprofit organization that advocates for locally identified rural priorities in Washington state. The mission statement for PRWA reads as follows: *Working with rural communities to develop their capacity to create a prosperous and sustainable future.* Our goals of elevating the rural voice in our state, advocating for rural priorities, and seeking to provide capacity where needed to rural areas, remained a top priority in 2020. The following is a summary of our most recent activities.

In late 2019, PRWA completed its broadband planning work in two areas of Washington state. First, we completed a broadband development plan update for the Methow Valley in Okanogan County. The plan update was delivered to to the Methow Valley Broadband Action Team, which decided to take over the development of applications for the necessary resources to complete expansion of the broadband infrastructure in the Methow Valley area. In addition, working through the Washington State University Extension office with funding provided by PRWA, a report was completed on the Two Rivers Prepositioned Fire Camp in Stevens County, in cooperation with the Stevens County/Spokane Tribe Broadband Action Team. WSU Extension provided project management, staffing, and administration of the feasibility/technical assessment for the Two Rivers Fire Camp. Their report summarized the findings, continuing the project. Finally, PRWA worked with tribes on the Olympic Peninsula of Washington to approve the use of the Lower Elwa Heritage Center as a training HUB for local Tribes; helped develop a business partnership for the Emerald Coast Opportunity Zone for broadband development with Jamestown Network; and helped the Lummi Tribe secure a CERB Rural Broadband Planning Grant through Washington State.



In 2020, in cooperation with the Washington Department of Commerce, the Association of Washington Cities (AWC), and several non-profit providers of specific technical resources, we developed a Concept Paper for providing technical assistance to rural communities in Washington state that had previously identified community needs but did not have the resources or staff capacity to prepare applications for the necessary resources to meet those needs. PRWA shared the concept paper with several foundations in Washington and, after a process to identify specific examples of where assistance was needed, received a \$75,000 grant from the Ballmer Group to address specific needs of rural communities in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

PRWA then began a process of contacting small (under 5,000 population) rural communities in Eastern Washington to identify communities that had identified needs but lacked the necessary resources to prepare applications for the resources to meet their needs. Following a two-month process involving discussions with state agencies, AWC and approximately 20 small city and county elected officials and organizations, the PRWA Board agreed to enter a partnership with Innovia Foundation and Avista Corporation to provide technical assistance for two previously identified projects in rural Eastern Washington: The Lincoln County Broadband Expansion Project, and the Development of a Telemedicine Resource Clinic in the town of Garfield, Whitman County. PRWA will provide technical assistance resources to apply for the necessary funding to complete these projects over a two-year period.