

*AOC Principles originally adopted November 15, 2007  
Amended in 2008, 2009 and 2010*

**Association of Oregon Counties**



**Legislative Committee**



**Overarching Principles for AOC**

*County government is unique in its ability to meet the needs of its citizens  
with convenient access and the ability to hold elected officials accountable for results.  
County government is the government closest to all the citizens of Oregon.*

**Oregon's counties are:**

- **Committed to responsive, efficient and effective local government**
- **Committed to healthy and safe communities**
- **Committed to quality, livable and economically viable communities**
- **Committed to safe and efficient transportation for our citizens**
- **Committed to achieving community-based goals for our environment**
- **Committed to meeting the learning and health needs of our citizens**

Oregonians hold the state *and* their counties responsible for delivering critical public services.

Oregon's counties are the hub for coordination and delivery of many shared state-county services.

No two Oregon counties are exactly alike. This diversity requires a flexible approach to statewide policymaking. *One size will not fit all.*

As such, the Association of Oregon Counties stands firm on these principles:

- No unfunded mandates
- Flexibility in revenue raising ability
- Local control
- No responsibility without authority
- Commitment to state-county partnership
- Honor previous agreements made with the:
  - Oregon Legislature
  - Governor of Oregon, and
  - State of Oregon agencies
  - United States government
- Work effectively with other governments, including tribal governments
- Preservation of local community

***Association of Oregon Counties***  
■  
**Communications Policy Committee**  
**Principles**

Communication is vital to a vibrant, healthy and successful Oregon. Communication tools for the delivery of information are critically important. Access to high speed, consistent broadband infrastructure is absolutely necessary to disseminate information and improve public safety, economic development, education and health care statewide. Oregon counties have an important role in the development and implementation of communication infrastructure and delivery of vital information.

The Communications Policy Steering Committee is:

- *Committed to insuring that every Oregonian has access to the world wide web through the latest and most efficient delivery system available,*
- *Committed to providing efficient and effective public safety communications systems for the protection of life and property,*
- *Committed to using technology to improve the life in Oregon counties,*
- *Committed to continually updating technology and technique to allow Oregon counties to communicate with each other in an efficient and effective manner and*
- *Committed to improving communication by the Association of Oregon Counties with its members and the citizens of Oregon.*

With communications technology rapidly changing and Oregon counties in the forefront of insuring access to the latest technology, the Communications Policy Steering Committee of the Association of Oregon Counties stands firm on these principles:

- *Access for all Oregonians to high-speed broadband technology and the world wide web,*
- *Flexibility in the choice and mix of technologies,*
- *Support for investment in technology that can coordinate partnerships between the public sector and the private sector,*
- *Provide more and improved information dissemination for Oregonians using technology,*
- *Provide more and improved access to e-government functions for Oregonians,*
- *No unfunded mandates for the installation, improvement and maintenance of public safety communications systems,*

*Communications Committee principles, continued*

- *Firm, unequivocal partnerships with the federal and state governments for the installation, improvement and maintenance of public safety communications systems,*
- *Provide more and improved information for the members of the Association of Oregon Counties about vital and critical issues impacting Oregon counties and*
- *Commitment to encourage communication and information sharing among the members of the Association of Oregon Counties.*

***Association of Oregon Counties***  
■  
**Community Development Committee**  
**Principles**

- Support enhanced community-based economic and community development activities with maximum flexibility to recognize regional needs and differences.
- Support local capacity to deliver workforce and community development services for the retention/creation of jobs in all regions of the state.
- Support increased flexibility in the land use system to better accommodate economic and community development.
- Provide opportunities for connecting and partnering with the state and the business community involved in community development.
- Support the retention, expansion and creation of jobs especially for living wage jobs.

***Association of Oregon Counties***  
■  
**Environment & Energy Committee**  
**Principles**

Sustainable actions are those that use resources and protect the environment in manner that provides for society's current and future needs. Counties play an important role in meeting the economic, social and environmental needs of their communities and have the ability to improve community health and viability by considering sustainability in the services they provide.

The Environment and Energy Steering Committee is committed to:

- Preserving a healthy Oregon by managing our natural resources for the long term,
- Using energy efficiently in county buildings and vehicles,
- Providing leadership at the local level to demonstrate and support sustainable practices,
- Monitoring and promoting opportunities for “green” industry in Oregon,
- Collaborating with other AOC steering committees to consider social and economic impacts of sustainability.

Because Oregon is geographically diverse and the needs of counties differ, there are many approaches that can achieve sustainability objectives. With these considerations in mind, AOC supports policies that encourage:

- Developing and using alternative energy locally and globally,
- Community scale energy projects,
- Energy efficient practices,
- Clean water and air,
- Purchasing of environmentally friendly products,
- Green building,
- Responsible solid waste management and
- Noxious weed control.

## ***Association of Oregon Counties***

### **■ Governance Committee Principles**

#### **General personnel issues:**

- AOC generally follows the lead of the private sector employer associations in not supporting proposals that will increase personnel costs. AOC may oppose selected general personnel issues.
- When a general employment issue only applies to the public sector, including counties, AOC generally does not support proposals that will increase county personnel costs.

#### **PERS issues:**

- AOC supports fair retirement benefits for county employees at a stable, sustainable, affordable cost to county government.
- AOC is generally opposed to proposals that:
  - Increase employer costs:
  - Expand the definition of those eligible for police/fire benefits,
  - Expand opportunities for early retirement; and/or
  - Expand opportunities for PERS retirees to work for PERS participating employers.

Specific proposals may be reviewed to see if a general policy exception is warranted.

#### **Prevailing wage on public contracts:**

- AOC is neutral regarding the requirement for prevailing wages on public works projects.
- AOC supports clarity in laws and administrative rules regarding applicability of prevailing wages on public improvement projects.
- AOC is opposed to all requirements that make it harder for counties to administer the provisions of the prevailing wage laws.
- AOC is opposed to any provisions that would make counties the enforcement agent for prevailing wage laws.

*Governance Committee principles, continued*

A proposal must reasonably respect the different service priorities of the citizens of each county and minimize reduction of policymaking authority of the county governing body. To the extent practicable, a proposal shall:

- Be clear and understandable,
- Provide revenues that are stable and adequate enough to meet its intent,
- Be fair to county taxpayers,
- Minimize preventable social, economic and environmental costs and
- Have a rational linkage between the revenue source and its dedicated function, if revenue from a tax or fee is dedicated to a specific function.

A proposal must avoid erosion of the counties' ability to raise their own local revenues to provide local service levels expected by citizens, including:

- No unfounded mandates from shifts in service of administrative responsibility,
- No preemption of local revenue authority unless an alternative source of revenue is provided,
- Funding of legislatively granted exemptions from local revenue sources and
- Funding by the state for state-authorized economic development incentives implemented by a county. For example, enterprise zones forgive property taxes to a county for a period, while providing an immediate incentive for enhancing income taxes to the state. State funding of these types of incentives would stimulate more active implementation of them.

***Association of Oregon Counties***  
■  
**Human Services Committee**  
**Statement of Principles & Basic Philosophy**

The Association of Oregon Counties recognizes the responsibility of county governments to protect and enhance the lives of its citizens and residents. Counties have been at the forefront in implementing a comprehensive, integrated system of human and family support services, encompassing evidence-based prevention, intervention and treatment approaches. In recognizing and building upon existing social foundations, county governments serve as the link among federal, state and municipal policies and the delivery of critical services in ways that maintain and foster self-sufficiency in communities, families and individuals.

The AOC mission statement guides the work of its committees. In addition, the following principles and philosophy guide the AOC Human Services Committee to support a continuum of human services for families and individuals:

**Political Process Principles:**

We assert that programs mandated by the state and federal governments should be fully funded. Counties must have adequate time to implement major changes to federal and state programs to prevent disruptions in service delivery. Policy and administrative changes in federal and state program and practice should encourage the maximum amount of county participation. Counties must be partners in the design and reform of human service systems.

**Service Delivery System Principles:**

**The comprehensive system of human services provided jointly by federal, state, county and local partnerships should incorporate the following characteristics:**

**Community Based** – Provision of services that are flexible to meet local community needs.

**Integrated and Collaborative** – Promotion of services that integrate the work and efforts of all sectors of our communities: faith and/or neighborhood-based, non-profit, education, criminal justice, and federal and state-operated services.

**Family Driven/Youth Guided** – Services that take into account the needs and impacts of issues and crises from the perspective of the entire family.

**Prevention Oriented** – While promoting a comprehensive continuum of services, promoting early preventive services to reduce the impact on individuals of escalating problems and reduce the costs associated with more intensive and costly interventions.

**Outcome Based** – Promote effective or “evidence-based” practices and open opportunities to promote community-based ideas that have measurable positive results; promote evidence-based and promising programs to the extent possible within available funding.

*Human Services Committee principles, continued*

**Strong Partnerships** – Provide opportunities for connecting with the state and local public and nonprofit agencies and tribes providing human services within the framework of county government, and tribal governments, and for linking with other local government advisory committees related to seniors, the Oregon Department of Human Services, public health, mental health, addictions, developmental disabilities, children and families and veterans.

**Open Communications** – Perform committee business in an open and forthcoming manner; conduct meetings with frequency and regularity to ensure access and attendance.

**Legislative Policy Principles:**

The AOC Human Services Steering Committee will be more likely to support proposed legislation impacting county human services that reflects the following principles:

- Flexibility in program design to meet local community needs
- Protect the Local Public Health Authority
- Protect the Local Mental Health Authority
- Strengthen ability to fund programs
- Protect shared revenue agreements
- Support efforts that increase access to care for Oregonians
- Promote service delivery system principles
- Support local decision making within partnerships of shared services
- Support human service-related revenue principles in legislative strategy
- Support strategies that increase efficiencies and reduce “red tape.”

**Policy Principles for Health Care Reform**

- Restore the partnership between county and state and federal governments;
- Provide access to affordable, quality health care to all – ensure that people have access to health insurance and to care providers throughout Oregon;
- Invest in public health, including health promotion and disease and injury prevention;
- Stabilize and strengthen the local health care safety net system, especially Medicaid and disproportional share hospital (DSH) payments;
- Invest in the development of the health professional and paraprofessional workforce;
- Ensure that county health agencies have the resources to meaningfully use health information technology;

*Human Services Committee principles, continued*

- Support the integration of all health care for the best client care;
- Promote person-centered planning around public health, mental health, primary care and alcohol and drug prevention, treatment and recovery;
- Enable elderly and disabled persons to receive the services they need in the least restrictive environment;
- Reform the delivery and financing of health services in the jail system and allow access to Medicaid for certain services; and
- Assure clients who are dual eligible (both Medicaid and Medicare) get the level of care to which they are entitled.

***Association of Oregon Counties***  
■  
**Public Lands & Natural Resources Committee**  
**Principles**

**AOC Framework: Federal Land Management**

County government is uniquely positioned to provide leadership and facilitate resolution to the often intensely contentious issues arising out of federal land management policies and decisions. County governments have developed productive long-term relationships with federal government officials, which include frequent discussions with local federal managers about management direction and on-the-ground activities, periodic discussions with federal policy-makers about the implications of active and proposed policies for the local landscape and communities, and sharing of resources and federal revenues resulting from management activities. At the same time, county government is the only local governmental institution that represents all the land area and people affected directly or indirectly by federal land management. Counties are close to the people day-to-day, can best provide community forums to reach an inclusive and meaningful local viewpoint regarding federal activities and proposals, and can communicate this view directly to federal officials.

AOC supports federal land management policies that permit and encourage:

- Active and adaptive management and protection of watersheds, habitat, forests and rangelands, which will sustain healthy and productive ecosystems over the long-term and will recognize the integral role humans play on the landscape,
- Site-specific management,
- Flexibility based on the rapidly increasing knowledge of natural processes,
- Measures to significantly reduce the potential for catastrophic fires and other catastrophic events, such as those caused by uncontrolled insect infestation and spread of noxious weeds,
- A stable and reasonable supply of products from federal lands,
- Open and meaningful participation by counties and local stakeholders,
- Thorough local involvement and substantial local support, and adoption by legislation addressing one designation at a time, when considering new wilderness designations,
- Protection, through employment opportunities and other means, for counties and communities dependent on federal land resources and
- Appropriate federal investment for restoration and other adaptive management activities.

**Blueprint for identifying deficiencies in natural resources/public lands management policies and policy-making processes**

(a.k.a. “Enlibra” Western Governors’ Association)

**National Standards, Neighborhood Solutions – Assign responsibilities at the right level.**

- Public processes are used to identify and protect the collective values of the nation’s public. The federal government sets national standards and objectives that identify the appropriate uses and levels of protection to be achieved. As they do so, they should consult with the states, tribes, and local governments, as well as concerned stakeholders.
- When environmental standards have not been historically within federal jurisdiction, non-federal governments retain their standard setting and enforcing functions to ensure community involvement and consideration of unique, local-level circumstances.
- There should be flexibility for non-federal governments to develop their own plans to achieve identified standards and objectives and to provide accountability. Plans that consider more localized ecological, economic, social and political factors have more public support and involvement and thus reach national standards more efficiently and effectively.
- The federal government should support non-federal efforts in this regard with funds and technical assistance.

**Collaboration, Not Polarization – Use collaborative processes to break down barriers and find solutions.**

- Regulatory tools are reaching the point of diminishing returns. Natural resources issues tend to be highly polarizing.
- Successful policy implementation is best accomplished through balanced, open, and inclusive approaches at the ground level to develop locally based solutions. This approach increases the likelihood of involved parties staying committed over time to the solution and its implementation.

**Reward Results, Not Programs – Move to a performance-based system.**

- Focus on outcomes, not programs. Reward innovative approaches to achieving desired outcomes.

**Science for Facts, Process for Priorities – Separate subjective choices from objective data gathering.**

- Reach agreement on the underlying facts as well as the range of uncertainty surrounding the question at hand before trying to frame the choices to be made. Use a public, balanced, and inclusive collaborative process and a range of respected scientists and peer-reviewed science.

*Public Lands & Natural Resources Committee principles, continued*

- If the collaborative process among stakeholders does not resolve scientific disagreements, decision-makers must evaluate the differing scientific information and make the difficult policy choices.
- Decision-makers should use ongoing scientific monitoring to adapt management decisions as necessary.

**Markets Before Mandates – Pursue economic incentives whenever appropriate.**

- Market-based approaches and economic incentives often result in more efficient and cost-effective results and may lead to more rapid compliance. These approaches reward environmental performance, promote economic health, encourage innovation and increase trust among government, industry and the public.

**Change a Heart, Change a Nation – Environmental understanding is crucial.**

- Government has a role in educating people about stewardship of natural resources and to promote individual responsibility by rewarding those who meet their stewardship responsibilities.

**Recognition of Benefits and Costs – Make sure all decisions affecting infrastructure, development and environment are fully informed.**

- Implementation of policies should be guided by an assessment of the costs and benefits of different options across the affected geographic range. Cost-benefit assessment should look at life-cycle costs and economic externalities imposed on those who do not participate in key transactions.
- Not all benefits and costs can be easily quantified or translated into dollars. There may be non-economic factors, such as equity within and across generations, that should also be fully considered. The assessment should consider all of the social, legal, economic and political factors while ensuring that neither quantitative nor qualitative factors dominate.

**Solutions Transcend Political Boundaries – Use appropriate geographic boundaries for environmental problems.**

- Issues often fall within natural basins. Focusing on the natural boundaries of the problem helps identify appropriate science, possible markets, cross-border issues and the full range of affected interests and governments that should participate and facilitate solutions.

## ***Association of Oregon Counties***

### **■ Public Safety Committee Principles**

■ Public safety organizations should operate as a coordinated, cooperative system involving components that are complimentary and balanced, and that share common goals. Public safety organizations should work together to address core issues that cross agency and jurisdictional lines.

(a) The first line of defense against crime should be prevention. It should focus on the causes of crime and criminogenic risk factors. Prevention may include, but is not limited to, prevention of child abuse and neglect, creation of affordable housing, respecting the personal rights of each member of the community, creation of family wage jobs, elimination of bias against minorities, providing for foster care, gang prevention programs and collaboration with citizens and community leaders.

(b) The first target of the public safety system should be violent crimes against persons.

(c) Services for crime victims are vitally important.

■ Personal accountability and reformation of offenders should be recognized as two of the primary functions of the criminal justice system.

■ Recidivism reduction and successful reentry should be primary public safety goals.

■ Treatment and intervention programs should be cost effective and evidence based.

■ Mental Illness should be treated, not punished. Incarcerated offenders who also have mental illness should receive appropriate treatment both during and after incarceration. Treatment for mental illness should be adequately funded by the state and provided in an appropriate treatment setting.

■ The system response to criminal behavior that is driven by drug or alcohol abuse or addiction should include appropriate drug or alcohol treatment.

■ Human Services, Emergency Management, Public Health and Public Safety are linked and should be coordinated.

■ State-County partnerships should be jointly developed and maintained; they should be adequately, reliably and sustainably funded.

## ***Association of Oregon Counties***

### **■ Transportation Committee Principles**

- The integrated system of Oregon's roads, streets, highways and bridges are essential components of our community development system providing vital transportation links for all modes of transportation and the movement of goods and services.
- Declining revenues and increasing costs have caused a continuing decline in road and bridge maintenance and preservation. Maintenance and preservation are essential to preserving the investment of our existing infrastructure.
- Oregon's high growth counties have transportation needs unique to growth issues. Their projects tend to be high-cost modernization and capacity-adding projects and are well beyond the means of the primary revenue source: the gas tax. Addressing the growth issue is essential to the health of the entire system.
- Oregon's low growth counties and/or timber dependent counties are facing critical system needs that their reduced revenues cannot meet. It is essential to the entire transportation system that this issue be addressed.
- The traditional formula for distributing transportation funds needs to remain flexible. However, it must not become so complex and confusing that it becomes burdensome or meaningless.
- No preemption, limits or granting of exemptions to any local tax source should be legislated without an acceptable alternative.
- Support distribution of the state highway funds, 50 percent to the state, 30 percent to counties and 20 percent to cities.
- Preserving and enhancing the efficiency of Oregon's freight system is essential for supporting economic and community development.
- A viable public transportation system is important for access to jobs, health care and quality of life for Oregonians through increased mobility, reduced congestion, enhanced economic development and conservation of critical resources.

## ***Association of Oregon Counties***

### **■ Water Policy Committee Principles**

With respect to water policy, the Association of Oregon Counties shall seek to:

- Gain and support a formal relationship with agencies and individuals with significant roles in establishing and implementing water policy in this state; and
- Ensure clean and adequate water supply for current and future residents, agriculture, other industries and the natural environment in a way that reduces waste and encourages conservation:
- Apply these values:
  - Collaborate,
  - Do no harm,
  - Apply sound, verified, peer reviewed science,
  - Achieve balance,
  - Enhance public policy,
  - Look beyond individual county and state boundaries,
  - Look forward,
  - Stay positive,
  - Approach change incrementally,
  - Participate meaningfully in the policy-making process and
  - Take responsibility for developing solutions.