

Proposal for Congressional Directed Spending

Project Title: Western Oregon University Arts and Community Revitalization Initiative

Recipient: Western Oregon University (WOU)

Location: Monmouth, Oregon

Funding Request: \$4,275,000

Executive Summary

Western Oregon University (WOU) requests **\$4,275,000 in federal funding** to advance the *Western Oregon University Arts and Community Revitalization Initiative* through the comprehensive renovation of Rice Auditorium. This project will transform one of the only large-scale performance venues in Polk County into a modern, fully accessible, and safety-compliant regional arts and cultural hub.

Rice Auditorium serves not only WOU's academic programs, but also the City of Monmouth, the City of Independence, and the broader Polk County community. The proposed renovation will address critical deficiencies in Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility and Fire Life Safety systems while modernizing stage infrastructure, audience configuration, and instructional production spaces.

Through this initiative, WOU will strengthen community partnerships, expand cultural programming capacity, and enhance regional economic vitality. The upgraded facility will support workforce development in performing arts, technical theatre, music production, and arts education—providing students with professional-grade training environments that translate directly into career readiness.

By revitalizing this shared civic asset, the project positions Western Oregon University as a driver of arts-based economic activity, community engagement, and long-term regional competitiveness in rural Oregon.

Strategic Need & Community Impact

Rice Auditorium will be modernized into a true flagship teaching and performance space. It will serve WOU's academic programs, host community and regional events, and stand as a source of pride for the University, the City of Monmouth, and Polk County. Rice Auditorium is one of the only large auditoriums in the entire Polk County. The current auditorium has a poorly designed lobby with no space for concessions, non-ADA restroom facilities, a cramped and unventilated scene shop, an inadequate performer green room, a backstage area and fly system, and an audience configuration that does not meet accessibility standards. The auditorium also lacks adequate fire life safety systems, such as fire alarms and sprinklers. The renovation will address every one of these shortcomings while preserving and enhancing the auditorium's core acoustic and performance capabilities.

Proposed Services & Capabilities

The renovated auditorium will serve as the engine for a multi-purpose performance arts center:

<p>Performance Hall and Seating</p>	<p>The auditorium will be enhance the guest experience, with a focus on safety, accessibility, and compliance by reconfiguring the 600 seats in a new seating arrangement featuring rows and a grand center entrance, replacing the current side-only entry points that create congestion and safety concerns. Two mid-section aisles will be added for accessible entry, with carpeting, lighting, and ADA handrails throughout. The light and sound boards will be relocated to an elevated booth position, properly renovated to support modern production requirements.</p>
<p>Fire Life Safety, Stage, Fly System, and Technical Infrastructure</p>	<p>The renovation will update the auditorium’s safety and technical systems required in a modern academic and community facility. Essential Fire Life Safety (FLS) systems, such as fire alarms and sprinklers will be updated to ensure prompt fire detection and prevention. The stage will receive a full fly system upgrade with motorized electrics, eliminating weight-loading concerns and enabling rapid, safe rigging changes between productions. A hydraulic orchestra pit will be installed, providing flexibility for productions requiring a live orchestra as well as the ability to reclaim that space as additional seating when not in use. Acoustic shells will be installed that serve a dual purpose: reflecting sound for concert performances and providing built-in storage when not in use. A permanent, front-mounted projection screen and upgraded curtains will round out the technical capabilities of the performance space. Critically, updated stage projectors, significantly more capable than the current aging units, will enable scenic projection techniques that reduce the cost and construction time associated with traditional painted scenery, a budget and efficiency improvement that will benefit productions for years to come.</p>
<p>Scene Shop, Costume Shop, Production Spaces, and Restrooms</p>	<p>The project will allow Rice Auditorium to be more available for performances, lectures, and community meetings. The creation of a dedicated costume shop with expanded floor plan, integrated storage systems, an adjacent classroom for costume construction instruction, and an office for the costume shop supervisor will take the building and storage of sets off the main stage and out of the lobby. A separate costume and scenic properties room, designed to accommodate up to 15 students for instructional purposes will feature dedicated workspace, a dye vat with proper ventilation (addressing the significant safety concern associated with fabric dyeing in inadequately ventilated spaces), and a spray booth with external exhaust for painting props and applying finishes. These are not amenities; each is a code-required safety feature that the current facility lacks. Restrooms, which are aging and frequently require repair, will be fully renovated to ADA standards.</p>

Workforce Development: Training the Next Generation

This project will drive workforce development in the local communities through training the next generation of performing arts professionals and K-12 music, dance, and theatre teachers. Specifically, each teaching space has been designed in direct consultation with faculty to support current instructional methodologies, and each performance space has been configured to provide students with professional-quality experiences that translate directly into workforce readiness and audience members with a facility that enables them to comfortably enjoy the performance, show, or meeting they are there to attend.

The expansion of the scene shop to twice its current size, the creation of a dedicated costume shop and props facilities, and the addition of a wardrobe and maintenance room address specific workforce preparation needs in technical theatre. Students graduating from WOU's theatre program require hands-on experience with industry-standard facilities, which the current faculty does not meet. Professional paint frames, proper ventilation systems for dye and spray work, and dedicated construction spaces that mirror the technical environments they will encounter in professional theatres, regional performance venues, and entertainment production companies.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook, performing arts professionals who receive hands-on, facility-supported training, particularly in production, technical theatre, music education, and ensemble performance, have meaningfully better employment prospects than those who do not. WOU's performing arts programs include instrumental ensembles, choir, symphony orchestra, theatre production, and dance, all of which require professional-grade facilities to deliver the experiential learning that employers and graduate programs expect. This project ensures that WOU can deliver on that expectation.

A renovated Rice Auditorium directly expands student access to performance opportunities. Rice Auditorium can remain available for community events, festivals, and additional student productions even during intensive rehearsal periods for mainstage shows. This capacity increase translates to more students gaining performance experience, more opportunities for student employment in technical roles (lighting, sound, stage management), and more frequent engagement with professional visiting artists and regional performing arts organizations.

Budget & Scope of Work

Requested Federal Funding: \$4,275,000 to renovate the auditorium, adjacent restrooms, address ADA and FLS issues, renovate stage and fly system, and create a stand-alone scene shop with storage and staging area. This request breakdown into the following scope of work.

Fire Life Safety	\$350,000
Auditorium and Restrooms	\$1,900,000
Stage and Fly	\$925,000
Scene Shop and Storage	\$1,100,000
Total	\$4,275,000

Conclusion

Economic development for rural communities like Monmouth and the broader Polk County region is substantially dependent on the vitality of its public, regional university. Rice Auditorium and the performing arts programs serve as a front door to Western Oregon University and as a draw for visitors from across the Willamette Valley. According to the Americans for the Arts' Arts & Economic Prosperity 6 report that is attached to this application, the nonprofit arts and culture industry generated \$ 375,366 in economic activity during 2022- \$164,986 in spending by the arts and culture organizations and an additional \$210,380 in event-related expenditures by their audience. This activity supports seven jobs in Monmouth, generates \$178,944 in household income for local residents, and delivers \$51,515 in tax revenues to local, state, and federal governments.