

# Dora, Oregon



	Dora
Population (2000)	250 <sup>33</sup>
Municipal budget (2005)	N/A
Per capita income (2000)	\$13,700 <sup>34</sup>
Median household income (2000)	\$27,500 <sup>35</sup>
Poverty rate (2000)	20% <sup>36</sup>
Minority population (2000)	7% <sup>37</sup>
Proximity to urban center	150 miles to Eugene, Ore.
Proximity to interstate highway	75 miles
Strategic approach	Downtown development
Time frame	2002-2006

Dora demonstrates that very small towns can accomplish big things. This tiny farming and cattle-ranching town has raised more than \$880,000 for a new fire station, an expanded library and a remodeled community center. “Getting this building to happen is an all-volunteer effort, done by amateurs,” said one local leader. “Nonetheless, with a bit more time and effort, we fully expect the fine old school building in Dora to be fixed up into a fine new fire hall and community center.” Leaders in Dora believed that rehabilitating the town’s civic infrastructure, which in this case is a dilapidated old fire station and school house, would demonstrate a high level of commitment to the community and in turn would help the town to attract additional investment.

*In Dora, a major renovation of the fire station, library and community center is intended to spark further investment in this small rural town.*

## The community and its history

Dora is a small, unincorporated agricultural community located on the east fork of the Coquille River in southwestern Oregon. The nearest town with any significant amenities is Myrtle Point (pop. 2,500), approximately 18 miles down a two-lane road. Economic activity in Dora is limited mainly to ranching and farming.

In 1946, a two-room school opened to serve a variety of purposes in the community. In addition to being the community school, it was a meeting place for residents and its gym was open at night for community use. The Dora Friendly Club, a service group known for its cookbooks,

<sup>33</sup> From interview with Craig Smith, Rural Development Inc. (RDI).

<sup>34</sup> Data for Myrtle Point (Dora’s closest incorporated neighbor).

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quilts, pies, potlucks and scholarship program, met there monthly. In 1981, the school closed when the county shifted Dora's students to a school in Myrtle Point. After a few years, the community decided to organize a volunteer fire department to provide service to Dora and the neighboring communities of Sitkum and McKinley. To leverage their town's existing infrastructure, one room of the old school was modified to house the fire department, and the other room was turned into a small library and community center. The school-turned-firehouse/library/community center opened in 1982.

By 2000, however, the building was aging and in need of repairs. The lights did not work, the toilet would not flush, and the fumes from the diesel fire trucks carried into the library and community center. Dora's only community infrastructure needed rehabilitation.

### The strategy

Dora's capacity-building strategy includes elements of infrastructure revitalization and community mobilization. In response to the crumbling facility, a group of Dora citizens, led by volunteers from the fire department, organized a fund-raising drive for a new fire station and remodeled community center. Leaders hoped that this revitalization project would catalyze additional investment in the community. An engineer from Rural Development Initiatives (RDI), a nonprofit rural capacity-building operation, worked with the community to develop a plan that would create a new fire station and salvage the old school. The price tag came to \$961,600.

While Dora is not a particularly wealthy community, its residents came together and raised more than \$80,000 locally for the new community center plan. Outside funding was needed, as well.

Initially, Kirk and other community leaders were confident they could raise the required funding within a year, an ambitious goal. Linda Kirk, a member of the fire department and retired school teacher, started writing grant applications in September of 2005 with guidance from a county commissioner and staff from RDI. With their help, Dora applied for a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) from Oregon's Economic Development Authority and for a number of foundation grants.

The process was tedious and complicated. "A grant award can be as slippery a catch as any native trout, and each one involves different strategy and tackle," said one resident of Dora. "Each grant application involves many steps and a good deal of waiting between steps." Despite the tedium, Dora's leaders discovered that grant funding could be a momentum-building process. Each grant received made the project more attractive to additional grantors because each dollar committed made it more feasible. Although it took longer than expected, Dora has raised over \$880,000 in grants and donations.

## What are the lessons from this story?

*Small towns can do big things. Dora, with 250 people and little economic activity, shows the critical importance of a positive attitude.* Few residents had any grant-writing experience, but they believed in their vision. “We thought to ourselves, ‘There must be money out there and people who want to fund this kind of project,’” explained Linda Kirk. By raising local funds and tapping into a diverse range of grant funding, Dora chipped away at the total project cost and built momentum for the project.

*Rural residents may be your most generous supporters.* NewTithing (a philanthropic research organization) suggests rural residents and those with smaller incomes are more likely to donate to civic causes. Rural towns should not overlook their residents as a source of financing for community projects. Residents and small businesses contributed over \$80,000 to Dora’s community center project.

## Contact information

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