

**Urban Sustainability Innovator Profile:  
Babe O'Sullivan****Babe O'Sullivan, sustainability director for Eugene, Oregon, is taking the lead on four USDN innovation projects at the same time, all supported by the USDN Innovation Fund. What was she thinking?**

"That's a good question," she responds. "A big motivator for me is this: Our sustainability program in Eugene is small, and we've had five years of budget cuts. Each year, we're on the cut list but manage to survive. So we have no program funding to draw from. USDN provides me with opportunities to fund projects that will have value in my hometown and are aligned with our city manager's priorities." Take, for instance, the first project to develop a framework and guidebook for Sustainable Economic Development. "It was well aligned with the city's priorities and created some currency for me with the economic development professionals," Babe says. And it allowed her to also bring her interest in sustainable consumption into the economic development realm, which gave it some legitimacy with the city's leadership. "See—there was a method in my madness." In each instance, Babe reached out to other USDN members and found they shared her questions and wanted to be part of a collaborative project.

Two other projects—a convening of urban foresters in the northwest region and research on how to measure sustainable consumption in a city—emerged from the Cascadia regional network of sustainability directors of which Babe is a co-lead. "Eugene brought these ideas into the regional discussion." They were adopted as priorities at the network's annual meeting of about 10 cities, and that led to development of two more proposals.

Of course, drafting a proposal in a team of collaborators is not nearly the same thing as having to implement the proposal as a team. "The writing is all aspirational; it's what you're hoping to achieve. But pretty quickly the realities of implementation become apparent and the honeymoon period is over," Babe says. Then the collaborators "have to figure out how to stay with the original intent of the project without lopping off what's meaningful. We're in the middle of that right now with several of these projects. You have to make critical choices along the path and be able to justify them." Typically, Babe says, the team is having to decide what it won't be able to do given the limited resources they're working with—but often that just means some things would become part of a future set of activities. "These projects are really just the start of something, and they may lead to next steps."

As for how she's managed to help develop four proposals that were funded, Babe reports, "The key is to know exactly what you're asking for, to be very specific," and to be careful not to oversell the potential impact. When she's gone back and read some of the original proposals, she added, "they were all very specific about what we wanted to do. I'm really proud of them." Because Babe is so clear about what's needed to move a project forward, she is a great catalyst for city collaborative innovation work.