

August 8, 2018

Word Count 190

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QuickPoint! – Metro’s Poorly Thought-Out Grants Program

By Justus Armstrong

Portland’s Metro Council plans to award grants for its Investment and Innovation program this fall. The program seeks to strengthen the local infrastructure for waste reduction; but with a combination of corporate welfare and vague performance measures, its methods are murky at best and unethical at worst.

With \$9 million in funding over three years, Metro’s program offers grants of up to \$500,000 to both non-profit and for-profit organizations for projects in line with Metro’s waste reduction goals. The grants are limited to costs tied to waste reduction projects; but padding companies’ expenses to benefit these projects goes outside the scope of Metro’s stated goals and undermines the competitive marketplace. Most citizens, and Oregon’s Constitution, would oppose tax funding for privately owned corporations. Apart from its good intentions and “green” packaging, what makes this project any different?

Metro’s Investment and Innovation program lacks clear direction and accountability to taxpayers for results. Since the grants outsource waste reduction to third parties, Metro can offer no estimates of the program’s ability to actually reduce waste. Metro is handing out taxpayer money for hypothetical benefits that are unlikely to match the price tag.

Justus Armstrong is Research Associate at Cascade Policy Institute, Oregon’s free market public policy research organization.