

# 2026

# LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

## DELIVERING VALUE, STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES, SUPPORTING OKLAHOMA'S GROWTH

The Oklahoma Association of Regional Councils (OARC) represents the state's 11 Councils of Government (COGs), which collectively support hundreds of local governments across all 77 counties. Through regional coordination, strategic planning, and targeted program delivery, COGs ensure that state and federal investments translate into measurable local outcomes.

In FY 2025, Oklahoma COGs produced over \$257.1 million in economic benefits statewide, demonstrating the high efficiency and impact of regionally administered programs. OARC's priorities for 2026 reflect what communities, local leaders, and agency partners consistently identify as essential to maintaining public safety, supporting older adults, strengthening rural infrastructure, and expanding economic opportunity.

OARC respectfully requests legislative consideration of the following targeted investments, each designed to provide strong returns for the State of Oklahoma and the communities legislators serve.



## \$257.1 M ECONOMIC IMPACT

**\$105.5M**

in grants and contracts awarded through COG-administered programs

**\$43.4M**

requested by rural communities through the REAP program

**\$29.8M**

awarded to rural communities through REAP grants

**\$15.9M**

in grants, equipment, and service delivered through Rural Fire Defense

**\$39.4M**

invested in transportation planning and construction projects

**94.7K**

transportation rides provided to older adults through AAA programs

**38.8K**

older adults served through coordinated aging and supportive services

**1.7M**

meals provided to older adults age 60+ statewide

## RURAL ECONOMIC ACTION PLAN (REAP)

### Strengthening Small Communities and Local Infrastructure

REAP remains one of the most important programs available to rural Oklahoma. With **over 90% of Oklahoma municipalities under 7,000 in population**, many communities lack the local revenue needed to repair water lines, replace aging equipment, maintain streets, or complete essential public facility upgrades. For many towns, REAP is the only viable source of capital investment.

#### FY 2026 DEMAND

- **\$43,427,497** requested
- **402 projects** awarded statewide
- **\$29,844,021** distributed for infrastructure, public facilities, roads, and public safety improvements

Every REAP project is reviewed and approved by local elected officials, ensuring that funds directly address local needs.

#### RETURN ON INVESTMENT

**\$12.82 in economic benefits generated for every \$1 in administrative cost**, demonstrating REAP's efficiency and accountability.

#### FY 2027 FUNDING REQUEST

Increase REAP funding to **\$39 million**. Ensuring equal allocations of **\$3.55 million per COG**.

#### WHY IT MATTERS



Supports critical infrastructure in small towns, helps rural communities retain population and businesses, ensures equitable access to state investment across all regions, reduces long-term infrastructure replacement costs

## RURAL FIRE DEFENSE PROGRAM (RFD)

### Enhancing Public Safety and Reducing Insurance Costs

More than **875 rural fire departments** rely on the coordination, certification, training support, and equipment assistance provided through the Rural Fire Defense Program. These services directly impact **Insurance Services Office (ISO) ratings**, which influence homeowners' and businesses' insurance premiums and reflect a community's fire protection capability.

#### STATEWIDE VALUE

- **\$15,960,166** in grants, equipment, and services delivered statewide
- Compliance support for annual state certification requirements
- Technical assistance for training, equipment inventory, and grant applications
- Ongoing support to improve operational readiness and response capability

#### FY 2027 FUNDING REQUEST

- Increase annual funding to **\$125,000 per COG**
- Establish RFD funding as a **dedicated State budget line item**
- Oppose changes that would reduce regional coverage or program continuity

#### WHY IT MATTERS



Reliable rural fire protection safeguards lives and property, supports lower insurance costs, and strengthens community stability. Consistent investment in the Rural Fire Defense Program ensures that rural and volunteer fire departments remain equipped, trained, and ready to respond across Oklahoma.

# FIRE DEPARTMENT CAB AND CHASSIS PROGRAM

## Reestablishing a Modern, Statewide Fleet Replacement Program for Rural Fire Departments

Oklahoma's rural and volunteer fire departments face significant challenges due to aging equipment, reduced access to federal surplus vehicles, rising apparatus costs, and increasing wildfire activity. **The former Cab and Chassis Program—last funded in FY 2006–2007—provided critical statewide fleet replacement but no longer exists.**

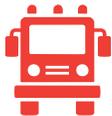
### FY 2027 FUNDING REQUEST

**\$9 million annually**, implemented over a 3–5 year statewide replacement plan. Commit to multi-year funding to ensure predictable, statewide fire apparatus replacement.

### ESTIMATED ANNUAL OUTPUT

- ≈120 Grass Rig chassis
- ≈11 Water Tender chassis
- Distribution based on number of departments per Rural Fire Coordinator district, with one tender per district.

### WHY IT MATTERS



- Replaces aging apparatus nearing 20 years old
- Addresses declining FEPP/FFP surplus vehicle availability
- Reduces maintenance and emergency replacement costs
- Strengthens county task forces and statewide mutual-aid operations
- Supports the viability of over 800 volunteer fire departments



# SUBSTATE PLANNING DISTRICT PROGRAM

## Expanding Local Government Capacity and Federal Grant Access

Councils of Government provide essential planning, grant writing, and technical assistance to local governments. For many small and rural jurisdictions, COGs are the only available planning resource to pursue economic development, infrastructure, and federal funding opportunities.

### STATEWIDE VALUE

- Current state investment: **\$27,272 per COG**
- Leveraged into approximately **\$16.9 million** in federal Economic Development Administration (EDA) grants and related private investment within the Substate Planning Districts
- Supports regional project development, grant applications, and implementation oversight

### RETURN ON INVESTMENT

State Substate Planning funds generate **significant federal and private investment returns**, far exceeding the state's initial investment and strengthening Oklahoma's competitiveness for national funding opportunities.

### FY 2027 FUNDING REQUEST

Restore Substate Planning funding to **\$50,000 per COG** and designate it as a **dedicated line item** within the Department of Commerce budget.

### WHY IT MATTERS



- Ensures communities have technical expertise needed to compete for federal funding
- Brings substantially more federal and private dollars into Oklahoma
- Supports business development, infrastructure investment, and job creation statewide
- Strengthens long-term regional planning capacity



## RURAL TRANSPORTATION PROGRAM

### Improving Mobility and Economic Participation in Rural Areas

Rural public transportation closes critical mobility gaps by connecting residents to jobs, medical care, groceries, senior centers, and essential services. These networks are especially important for older adults, individuals with disabilities, and residents without access to a personal vehicle.

#### FY 2027 FUNDING REQUEST

Provide **\$100,000** per COG for a statewide total of **\$1.1 million**.

#### WHY IT MATTERS



- Reduces long-term healthcare costs by ensuring access to preventive care
- Improves workforce participation and economic access
- Supports aging-in-place as Oklahoma's senior population continues to grow

## LAW ENFORCEMENT COORDINATOR PROGRAM

### Increasing Grant Capacity for Local Police and Sheriff Departments

COGs propose establishing a coordinator in each region to support local law enforcement agencies with grant research, writing, planning, and technical assistance.

#### FY 2027 FUNDING REQUEST

Invest **\$125,000** per COG, or **\$1.375** million statewide, to launch this program.

#### WHY IT MATTERS



- Helps rural and small agencies compete for federal and state law enforcement grants
- Supports equipment upgrades, training, and public safety initiatives
- Reduces administrative burdens on departments with limited staffing



# COMMUNITY EXPANSION OF NUTRITIONAL ASSISTANCE (CENA)

## Supporting Senior Centers and Addressing Nutritional Needs

More than **650,000 older adults** live in Oklahoma, and over **412 senior centers** rely on CENA funding to provide nutritious meals, social engagement, and essential services that support health and independence for older Oklahomans.

### CHALLENGES

- Funds often arrive late in the fiscal year
- Senior centers are required to expend all funds by June 30
- Supply chain delays and rising food costs limit purchasing flexibility
- Waiting list persist due to unmet nutritional need

This demand underscores the importance of adequately funding programs that older adults rely on.

### FY 2027 FUNDING REQUEST

- Increase statewide CENA funding to **\$3.5 million**
- Allow **carryover authority** to improve efficiency and reduce administrative strain on senior centers

### WHY IT MATTERS



- Ensures continued access to nutritious meals for vulnerable older adults
- Supports health, independence, and social connection
- Maximizes the impact of transportation and supportive services investments
- Reduces long-term healthcare and institutional care costs



# OLDER AMERICANS ACT TITLE III-B SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

## Providing Essential In-Home and Community-Based Support

Title III-B services—including transportation, homemaker assistance, legal support, and personal care—directly enable older adults to safely age in place.

### STATEWIDE VALUE

- 157,000 rides provided through 27 transportation partners
- Over 4,000 older adults supported through coordinated service networks

### FY 2027 FUNDING REQUEST

Increase the statewide match for III-B services by **\$2 million**.

### WHY IT MATTERS



- Reduces demand for long-term institutional care
- Supports access to medical appointments and pharmacy services
- Maintains quality of life for older Oklahomans



## CONCLUSION

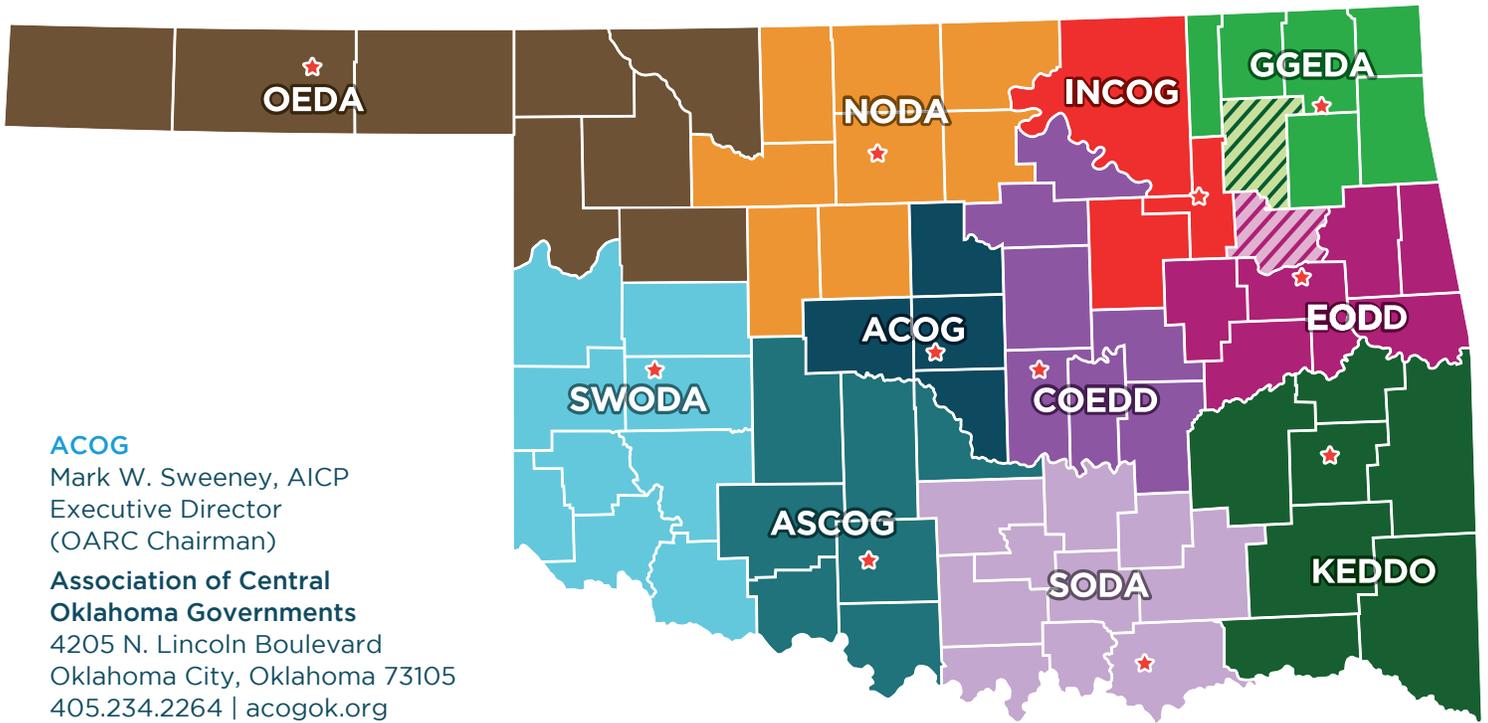
Effective, Efficient, and Essential for Oklahoma's Future

OARC and Oklahoma's 11 COGs deliver high-value programs with strong statewide impact, measurable results, and exceptional return on investment. Continued legislative support ensures that Oklahoma's communities—large and small—have the resources they need to grow, remain safe, and thrive.

**OARC looks forward to working with legislators to strengthen these critical programs in 2026 and beyond.**

*FY 2025 figures reflect actual dollars awarded or expended through Oklahoma Councils of Government, direct service outputs, documented REAP activity, and leveraged EDA and private investment reported statewide. Where submissions were incomplete or inconsistent, standardized methods and statewide averages were applied to ensure a consistent statewide snapshot.*

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