



Business Advancement Team

Athletic & Outdoor Action Plan

Contents

Background	02
About the Industry	03
Findings & Recommendations	08
Metrics	15
Industry Outreach	17
Conclusion	20
Contact Us	21



Background

In April of 2023, The City of Portland and Prosper Portland adopted a five-year economic strategy.

The City of Portland and Prosper Portland adopted a five-year economic strategy titled Advance Portland: A Call to Action for Inclusive Economic Growth in April 2023. Advance Portland is a collaborative strategy built through deep community engagement and is a roadmap to transform Portland into a thriving, inclusive, and sustainable 21st century city through robust partnerships with city bureau partners and community organizations.

Through economic research into the industry employment and business growth potential of Portland's traded sector clusters, the athletic and outdoor industry was identified as an established industry in Portland with the potential to create additional middle-income jobs and foster inclusive growth.

Learn more about Advance Portland's goals, strategy, progress, and join the movement.

[Visit Advance Portland](#) →





About the Industry

About the Industry

The Athletic and Outdoor (A&O) cluster is a broad category of companies producing innovative consumer goods and services that put Portland on the global map for innovation, design, and sustainability. Sectors in the cluster include footwear, apparel, gear, bicycle, knife/tool, bags, and accessories companies as well as their suppliers and service providers. In recent years, the industry work has grown to include a broader range of consumer products companies in the “maker” space that have similar growth needs to traditional A&O companies and are often founded by former employees of larger traditional A&O companies.

The industry consists of both large global brands and small- to medium-sized homegrown companies, with 96 percent of cluster companies being defined as a small business with fewer than 50 employees. Portland’s anchor A&O companies include Nike, Adidas, and Columbia Sportswear, which are known as “the Big 3”, and provide most of the employment in this industry for the region.

Mid-sized global brands are also numerous in the Portland A&O landscape and include companies such as Keen, Leatherman, Hoka, Danner, and others. Emerging companies such as Portland Gear, Orox Leather, Revant, and Wildfang represent the evolution of the local industry. Started five to ten years ago as friends-and-family operations with one to two employees or as the brainchildren of former “Big 3” employees, these companies have taken root and grown in Portland - increasing their physical footprint, employees, and loyal consumer base along the way.

The Portland region has the highest concentration of apparel and outdoor employees in the country, largely focused on design and innovation. The industry provides higher than average wages on a county level. In addition to companies like Nike, Adidas, and Columbia Sportswear, Athletic and Outdoor anchor businesses in the Portland metro region include Danner/Lacrosse, Hoka/Deckers, On Inc., Under Armour, and Pendleton Woolen Mills, among others.

#1

Concentration of
A&O businesses in
the nation

30k

Jobs

\$83K

Wages

30%

BIPOC Employees

10%

Employment
Growth



Portland's Priority Industries

The five priority industry clusters - Athletic & Outdoor, Green Cities, Food & Beverage Manufacturing, Metals & Machinery, Software & Media - demonstrate economic strength and competitiveness in Portland, as well as future growth potential and opportunities to leverage inclusion and climate action goals.

	Economic Growth Opportunity		Inclusion Impact		
	LQ, MSA 10 year growth	LQ, County 10 year growth	LQ, County	% BIPOC	% < Bachelor's
Green tag equals:	strong growth		\$67K MSA avg.	>27%K MSA avg.	>60% Low barrier
Athletic & Outdoor	1.3 (-35%)	1.6 (10%)	\$82.7k	30%	71%
Metals & Machinery	0.9 (11%)	0.8 (-5%)	\$74.7k	27%	76%
Green Cities	1.2 (35%)	1.0 (35%)	\$93.8k	25%	67%
Food & Beverage Manufacturing	1.1 (28%)	1.0 (23%)	\$58k	32%	77%
Software & Media	1.1 (69%)	1.3 (117%)	\$129.1k	23%	51%

Industry Strengths



01 Talent

Portland offers a high concentration of talent, particularly in design and innovation

02 Diverse Workforce

The industry has a higher than average percentage of BIPOC employees.

03 Local Suppliers

Suppliers and service providers are tailored to the industry in Portland.

04 Wages

Athletic & Outdoor businesses offer a high median wage compared to other industries.

05 Career Pathways

A range of small to large companies provide career opportunities from retail-level to executive.

Industry Challenges



01 Volatility

Industry growth and stability are dependent on consumer spending cycles.

02 Retention & Recruitment

Recruiting and retaining diverse talent is a challenge for Athletic & Outdoor businesses.

03 Cost Constraints

Accessing new markets and growth opportunities is cost prohibitive for smaller businesses in the industry.



Findings & Recommendations

Findings & Recommendations

To support this industry, Prosper Portland needs to create programming and solutions that work for the industry and that are developed alongside industry talent, business owners, and partner organizations.

Common issues raised regarding industry growth included high taxes, difficulty recruiting and retaining talent, a lack of networking opportunities for the industry, pandemic recovery (consumer spending and inflation), and access to new markets.

Across all businesses, livability issues, and in particular public safety and break-ins, were raised as key concerns for the industry. This is outside of the scope of the Cluster Action Plan, but worth noting as it creates a key barrier to growth.

Access to Markets

Industry-Wide Connecting and Networking

Talent Attraction and Support

Access to Capital

Marketing and Promotion



Access to Markets



Findings

01 Distribution Challenges

Small- and medium- sized brands are finding it difficult to get their products to retailers outside of the Pacific Northwest without distribution partners.

02 Small Business Culture

Portland's preference for micro and small businesses creates tension for medium-sized companies that are positioned to grow their brand regionally and nationally.

03 Scaling Opportunities

Increasing access to new customers outside of the state can help medium-sized companies transition to a full production schedule and scale up efficiently.

Recommendations

01 Expand Business Reach

Create opportunities for small to medium-sized brands to explore expanding their consumer base and wholesale relationships outside of Portland.

02 Grow Brand Visibility

Partner with state and regional organizations to showcase brands at events and conferences outside of Portland.

03 Engage in Industry Events

Create opportunities for brands to attend trade shows with an emphasis on finding retail and wholesale partnerships.

04 Grow Retail Presence

Connect businesses to retail opportunities in Portland (i.e. Pop-Up retail spaces, markets, etc.) to help grow direct-to-consumer sales.

Industry-Wide Connecting & Networking



Findings

01 Peer Learning

Brands and leaders are interested to come together to learn about trends, improve business outcomes, and develop relationships with peers.

02 Collaborative Ecosystem

Collaborative and brand-agnostic events create an inclusive ecosystem for companies to thrive.

Recommendations

01 Provide Educational Spaces

Continue to seek opportunities to provide education and training for brands and leaders, including peer-to-peer programs or sessions such as Jumpstart.

02 Organize Networking

Sponsor and organize events that bring the industry together as a whole or bring together specific segments (entrepreneurs, outdoor, biking, etc).

03 Provide Business Navigation

Maintain funding for the Athletic & Outdoor Industry Liaison to continue to support businesses with navigating city, state, and federal resources and funding opportunities.

Talent Attraction and Support



Findings

01 Retain Talent

Across the board, brands and leaders mentioned the importance of attracting and retaining top talent to Portland.

02 Industry Network

Talent has limited avenues for building a network in this industry outside their current employers.

03 Student Outreach

Engaging students in the industry as a future career will build the talent pipeline.

Recommendations

01 Talent Connections

Partner with industry organizations and educational institutions to support and sponsor events that can link talent with the industry.

02 Industry-Led Networking

Organize industry-led networking opportunities such as the Women in Footwear Design committee and related events.

03 Talent Spotlights

Provide a platform via web and social media to highlight the work of diverse individuals within the industry.

Access to Capital



Findings

01 Growth Funding

Access to capital is crucial for the growth of small businesses in this industry, particularly at low interest rates. Substantial capital may be required for equipment purchases, working capital, leasing or purchasing space, among other expenses.

02 Lack of Capital in Oregon

Medium-sized companies seeking investment dollars have a hard time finding investment due to the slower rate of growth for A&O/Consumer Products companies versus tech. The companies often seek funds outside of Oregon during fundraising rounds due to a lack of a robust VC ecosystem in Oregon for non-tech-based consumer goods.

03 Loan Products

Prosper Portland's loan and grant programs do not fully address the capital needs for small- and medium-size consumer products companies.

Recommendations

01 Capital Connections

Connect business owners with organizations that have strong funding relationships, including venture capital organizations and angel investor connections in and outside of Oregon.

02 Pitch Prep Support

Partner with technical assistance partners to prepare companies to pitch to investors. This support may include helping them get their finances in order in advance of the due diligence process and determining whether they want to take on equity partners.

03 Short-Term Loan Products

Identify and collaborate with community organizations that provide low-interest or short-term loan products to help business owners get through their most immediate capital needs.

Marketing and Promotion



Findings

01 Portland's Reputation

Businesses struggle to attract talent due to the negative portrayal of Portland in the national media.

02 Business Messaging

Talent, entrepreneurs, and business leaders want to contribute to generating positivity around the industry in Portland.

03 Competitive Advantages

While tax considerations will continue to be a hurdle in attracting new A&O businesses, the city should actively be promoting our competitive advantages such as talent, creativity, early adoption of technology, progressive and inclusive values, and global connections.

Recommendations

01 Promote Portland

Collaborate with state and regional entities to promote the Portland region as a global hub for the A&O industry via trade shows, marketing material, and familiarization tours.

02 Utilize Online Platforms

Continue to promote the industry- its talent and innovative companies, along with job opportunities and events- via the AOPortland.com website, industry newsletter, and social media.



Metrics

Metrics

To deliver on the outcomes outlined in this cluster action plan and make evidence-based decisions requires ongoing monitoring. These team-level performance metrics are captured across the Business Advancement Team's activities and are inclusive of all cluster activities teamwide. These will be used to evaluate progress on the goals of this plan and the cluster action plans. This cluster action plan and the metrics included below are aligned to the goals of Advance Portland, the city's 5-year economic development strategy.

Metric	Strategic Target	Notes
Cumulative number of Traded Sector business relocations (within Portland) and expansions	25	Cumulative Strategic Target from FY 2023-24 to FY 2028-2029
Number of Portland Traded Sector companies gaining access to new markets as a tool for growth	10	Annually
Cumulative jobs resulting from traded sector business relocations and expansions within Portland	1250	Cumulative Strategic Target from FY 2023-24 to FY 2028-2029
Number of businesses receiving technical assistance related to growth or inclusion	250	Annually
Number of companies participating in a Public Benefit Agreement or public pledge that aligns with Prosper Portland strategic inclusion goals	150	Strategic Target by FY 2028-2029
Number of employees at companies participating in a Public Benefit Agreement or public pledge	44,000	Strategic Target by FY 2028-2029
Percent of businesses reporting that achieved growth goals as a result of participating in programming	70%	Annually
Number of businesses reporting gaining skills or knowledge that will improve their inclusive practices	150	Strategic Target by FY 2028-2029
Cumulative local investment and spend through Enterprise Zone and business expansion programming FY 2023-24 to FY 2028-29	\$750,000, 000	Cumulative Strategic Target from FY 2023-2024 to FY 2028-2029
Cumulative spend at local BIPOC-owned businesses by Portland Means Progress businesses since its launch in 2019	\$700,000,000	Cumulative Strategic Target since 2019 by FY 2028-2029



Industry Outreach

Industry Outreach

Building upon the findings and recommendations of Advance Portland, Prosper Portland conducted 50 one-on-one meetings with business owners in 2023 and 2024.

Convening efforts related to the development of the cluster action plan took place between November 2024 and January 2025 and included surveying participants and leaders from A&O programming over the past few years.

Additionally, an executive roundtable was held in partnership with Oregon Outdoor Alliance's Portland Chapter to hear from business leaders regarding their needs and concerns.

Participant Demographics

14 small-size businesses with 1-20 employees

17 mid-size businesses with 20+ employees

Two large-size business with more than 1400 employees

Majority of companies earn \$5M+ in sales



Industry Outreach



Overall, survey participants represented a broad swath of the A&O industry, ranging from large to small companies, with the majority reporting annual sales exceeding \$5 million. The biggest challenges identified included talent acquisition and regulatory issues. Additionally, access to working capital, purchasing or maintaining equipment, and accessing new markets were identified by 20% or more of respondents as issues impacting the growth of their business.

In terms of how Prosper Portland or the city could provide support, networking events or industry- wide events, along with access to new markets (including wholesale or retail events), were the top two activities, identified by 50% or

or more of the respondents as being helpful. Support in areas such as working capital loans, access to talent, and educational/training opportunities rounded out the assistance needs with 30-40% of respondents wanting support in these areas. Public safety was identified by more than 50% of the respondents as an issue that needed addressing by the city of Portland.

Participants of the A&O executive roundtable represented medium-sized companies including Rimpl, Arena, Coast Products, Portland Gear, but large companies like Adidas and Mountain Hardware (a part of Columbia Sportswear) were also represented.

Growth opportunities identified by this group for the Portland A&O Industry included increasing collaboration between companies (both large and small brands), attracting more mid-sized companies (\$20-100 million revenue range), leveraging Portland's existing tech expertise with the outdoor industry, and creating opportunities for local brands through activations at trade shows or pop-up and retail corridors



Conclusion

The Portland Athletic and Outdoor Industry consists of some of the most innovative small-, medium-, and large-scale companies. The industry is known for fierce competition, but also a willingness to come together to find solutions to common problems. The Portland region has the highest concentration of apparel and outdoor employees in the country, largely focused on design and innovation.

To create and retain high median-wage jobs, these companies will need support and resources from Prosper Portland, the City of Portland, Multnomah County, the State of Oregon, and the federal government.

The A&O industry is a driver of innovation, growth, and sustainability. To ensure the advancement of this industry to a higher level, Prosper Portland and its partner agencies can support Athletic & Outdoor businesses by providing resources related to trade, talent, networking, and access to capital. This will maintain Portland's earned reputation as a global leader in the Athletic & Outdoor industry.

Contact the Business Advancement Team

Prosper Portland's Business Advancement Team is a catalyst for equitable economic growth. We help businesses grow by providing support and identifying opportunities that foster the creation of living wage jobs for all Portlanders.

Sucheta Bal - Athletic & Outdoor /
Consumer Products Industry Liaison
bals@prosperportland.us

[Visit us Online](#)