

OFFICE HOURS REPORT FRONTIER REGION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Collaboration is a strength of Frontier counties. ^[1]
2. The successes and challenges of RFGP 5250 provide lessons for future grants. ^[2]
3. Regionalization is a central idea for Frontier counties. ^[3]
4. Regulations hold organizations back from developing the facilities and services they need. ^[4]
5. Guidance for OHA in engaging with the Frontier region. ^[5]

OFFICE HOURS

OPAL hosted a virtual Office Hours session on November 27th, 2023. Eight grantees from the Frontier Region (Wasco, Sherman, Hood River, Umatilla, Morrow, Malheur & Baker Counties) were invited to attend (see accompanying Summary Report for full list of invitees). The session lasted one hour, and one organization attended. This report summarizes the findings from the grantee partner during that session.

ATTENDEES

[Wasco County Sheriff's Department](#) (Sheriff Lane Magill)

THEMES

1. [Collaboration is very strong across Wasco, Hood River & Sherman counties.](#) The region's rural geography, small population, and limited resources have driven the need for inter-county collaboration. The strong collaborative ethic in the tri-county region has allowed it to overcome adversities and setbacks for projects and continue to find success.
 - 1.1. Wasco, Hood River, and Sherman Counties collaborate constantly across their borders on matters related to mental health. Each county relies on the others for help, and it's successes are the result of a truly collaborative effort.
 - 1.2. Establishing defined norms and values at meetings has helped make collaborations successful. Sheriff Magill explained that, in their meetings, each person has an equal say, there's open dialogue, and there are no bad ideas. Most significantly, every person must leave their ego outside of the meeting and prioritize the needs of the community.
 - 1.3. Foundationally, each person in the meeting needs to understand why collaboration is important for community success. Leadership benefits from maintaining a servant mindset and prioritizing working together to uplift the entire community.

“Collaboration is the glue that’s held us together to get us through this, and it’ll get us across the finish line.”

–Sheriff Lane Magill, Wasco County

2. [The successes and challenges of RFGP 5250 could offer lessons for future grants.](#) Sheriff Magill felt that the process involved with RFGP 5250 had positive and negative aspects. Wasco County Sheriff’s Department was able to gain valuable insights into their communities of need, yet they also felt as though the overall experience was disorganized and too involved with politics.
 - 2.1. Through RFGP 5250 the Wasco County Sheriff’s Department was able to initiate partnerships with other organizations to conduct research for their proposal. The results of this research process allowed the Sheriff’s Department to learn more about minority populations in their region.
 - 2.2. Wasco County had already been developing plans for a new Columbia Gorge Resolutions Center when RFGP 5250 was announced. Sheriff Magill felt that the overall research process of RFGP 5250 was ineffective for organizations with projects already in-process who were prepared to take funding and immediately implement it.
 - 2.3. RFGP 5250 also provided a low amount of funding to a relatively large number of organizations. The challenges of this model are that it’s harder to get anything off the ground with less money, and in the end the overall impact is less. A pre-application vetting process would help to filter out the organizations with an idea, but no plan in place to carry it out.
 - 2.4. Furthermore, the shifting deadlines for submitting grant reports, and lack of communication to grantees led grantees to wonder about whether politics were becoming involved in the process.
3. [Frontier regions operate through a system of regionalization.](#) The rural geography and small populations of frontier regions require these areas to rely on ‘regionalization,’ which is a system of coordinating resources across counties. The system helps financially in developing economies of scale, and operationally in serving residents who regularly travel across the region.
 - 3.1. Regionalization is an essential part of the success for rural programs. Rural counties rely on pooling resources with neighboring counties to provide services across borders. For example, NORCOR, located in The Dalles, is the only regionalized jail in the state of Oregon. Hood River, Wasco, Sherman, and Gillam Counties all contribute services, to be able to use this resource. Coordinating services has enormous financial benefits for all counties involved, and this type of regionalization makes maintaining this facility possible.
 - 3.2. From an operational standpoint, regionalization accounts for the realities of living in a rural area. Residents in the area cross county borders frequently. Individuals receiving treatment for mental health or substance use disorder frequently move between Hood River, Wasco, and Sherman Counties. Coordinating resources across the region is important for quality and continuity of care for these individuals.
 - 3.3. Sheriff Magill ranks regionalization as essential for mental health, behavioral health, and drug and alcohol residential treatment services in rural regions.

“Regionalization is an extremely important concept that will really facilitate good quality services through Eastern Oregon.”

– Sheriff Lane Magill, Wasco County

4. [Outdated regulations prevent development of facilities and services that would benefit rural populations.](#) Wasco County has had to re-think their facility development plans for a behavioral health campus due to outdated state regulations. Similarly, regions must follow restrictive financial regulations that limit the services they can offer their communities.
 - 4.1. Wasco County is setting up an SRTF and initially planned to build a substance use disorder (SUD) treatment facility next door. Placing the SRTF and SUD treatment facility next to each other would allow providers to stabilize patients, and then walk them across the hall for intensive drug and alcohol treatment. Centralizing all treatment services would have a large benefit for patients and providers alike.
 - 4.2. However, there's an existing regulation that an SRTF and SUD treatment facility cannot be located within 1,200 feet of each other. The law, which has been on the books since 1963, is especially unreasonable in today's property market. It effectively prevents organizations like Wasco County from building a behavioral health campus that would make comprehensive treatment available in one location.
 - 4.3. Changing this facility siting regulation, or providing waivers or other flexibility, would permit organizations from building the facilities that would work best for their region. “There's people on our street that are suffering because our regulatory system is just so old and antiquated,” says Sheriff Magill.
 - 4.4. Finally, the regulatory structure of the behavioral health system has not been adapted to modern needs. Sheriff Magill discussed how they are extremely limited in what services they can provide due to present funding regulations, and that the lack of a strong foundation in the system doesn't help to build and maintain sustainable programs.
5. [Meetings with OHA are welcome, but the relationship needs to be rebuilt.](#) The Frontier region needs OHA leadership to show they are willing to think about problems in different ways, while acknowledging what has happened previously.
 - 5.1. Sheriff Magill discussed how the rebuilding of the relationship between OHA and organizations and communities must be based around the idea of procedural justice, which involves listening to what a person has to say and acknowledging that you heard them regardless of agreement of opinion. OHA can build legitimacy by accepting the difficulties of moving past previous experiences and showing commitment through helping communities with what they determine as most important.
 - 5.2. Meetings with Frontier organizations need to be in-person to have direct conversations. Offering a hybrid option would be beneficial too. OHA must approach meetings with a defined purpose and a clear plan in place for the meeting. Most importantly, OHA must follow through on every action

that it commits to, and that plans do not change once they have been made. It is also important to acknowledge those that are involved in the meeting and proposed following action.

"If I'm going to do this as a new system, you better do that new system. There's going to be people who like it. There's going to be people that aren't going to like it. But you better follow through."

–Sheriff Lane Magill, Wasco County

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. [Utilize, and learn from, the region's strong collaboration.](#)
 - 1.1. Collaboration is strong in the Hood River, Wasco, and Sherman tri-county region due to the need to regionalize. This collaborative ethic has the potential to be used as a model for other rural regions to facilitate collaboration or understand shortcomings.
2. [Reassess funding models for grant proposals.](#)
 - 2.1. Implement a pre-application vetting process for future grant proposal requests, to prioritize shovel-ready projects, and to disperse funding more quickly.
 - 2.2. Increase communication and transparency for organizations throughout grant processes.
3. [Accommodate for differences between rural and urban regions in policy processes.](#)
 - 3.1. Incorporate regionalization into behavioral health funding for rural areas.
4. [Remove or waive outdated regulations that create roadblocks for providing behavioral healthcare.](#)
 - 4.1. Re-think siting regulations for SRTF and SUD treatment facilities to allow comprehensive care through co-located services.
 - 4.2. Amend funding regulations to allow for more flexible treatment options.
 - 4.3. Trust organizations to report community needs and the methods needed to support them.
5. [Engage with organizations in the Frontier region through procedural justice.](#)
 - 5.1. Hold in-person and hybrid meetings with a clear agenda in place.
 - 5.2. Follow through on every plan made, and every action that has been promised.
 - 5.3. Build legitimacy by listening to, and acknowledging, organization and community members.