

OFFICE HOURS REPORT KLAMATH & LAKE COUNTIES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Regional collaboration has improved but could be expanded much further.^[1]
2. Rural geography creates barriers to providing and accessing resources in the community.^[2]
3. Housing in this region is lacking and unaffordable.^[3]
4. A lack of accountability for landlords has harmed the regional housing market.^[4]
5. Local communities are often opposed to housing development efforts.^[5]
6. Organizations struggle to hire staff and fund projects.^[6]
7. Organizations are open to meeting with OHA.^[7]

OFFICE HOURS

OPAL hosted a virtual Office Hours session on November 7th, 2023. Four grantees from around Klamath and Lake Counties were invited to attend (see accompanying Summary Report for full list of invitees). The session lasted one hour, and two organizations attended. This report summarizes the findings from grantee partners during this session.

ATTENDEES

[Klamath and Lake Community Action Services \(KLCAS\)](#) (Klamath & Lake Counties)

[Transformations Wellness Center](#) (Klamath County)

THEMES

1. [Collaboration between organizations has improved, but there is still room for expansion.](#) Organizations in Klamath & Lake Counties have seen some successes from collaborative efforts but are not yet able to carry out larger projects together.
 - 1.1. Collaborations through the RFGP 5250 grant were helpful in developing relationships between regional partners. As a result of collaborating on this project, regional organizations have become more aware of each other, including in forming partnerships and referring clients to one another for services. Regular ongoing meetings helped organizations understand the work their partners do, strengthened their referral processes, and encouraged collaborations with non-traditional partners. KLCAS noted that they had initially struggled to bring partners together for remote-only meetings for the project, and in-person meetings created higher engagement rates.
 - 1.2. An area of needed growth is developing regional capacity for organizations to carry out collaborative projects. KLCAS explained that they struggle with engaging volunteers and property managers. These relationships are necessary to develop permanent supportive housing in this region – a key development for the community.

2. [Rural geography creates barriers, preventing services from reaching clients.](#) Klamath & Lake Counties' rural geography leaves many community members out of reach of organizations and basic services they need.
 - 2.1. Public transportation within Klamath & Lake counties is nearly absent, with bus services often limited to only one day a week. This prevents many of the individuals who would benefit from services from being able to reach the organizations which provide them.
 - 2.2. Internet access is extremely limited within this region. There are many stipulations to accessing internet in the rural areas, such as geographic barriers and obstructions (i.e., users must be able to see a certain mountain, or there cannot be trees blocking the signal). The alternative satellite internet sources are far too expensive for most to acquire.
 - 2.3. Very rural residents are often out of range of all internet options and cell phone service. Some areas just have one bar of cell phone coverage. The lack of infrastructure and high prices serve as a major barrier for many residents in Klamath & Lake Counties.
 - 2.4. Additionally, wildfires in the area burned some fiber optic cables, leaving Lake County without internet for a period of time.
3. [There is a severe lack of available housing in Klamath & Lake Counties.](#) Housing is very scarce in the region, with affordable housing options extremely limited. This creates barriers for residents in finding housing, as well as for the organizations trying to support them through the process.
 - 3.1. Klamath & Lake Counties have a shortage of all housing options, with the regional vacancy rate remaining at 0% for a very long time. The vacancy rate increased after the pandemic rent moratoriums ended. However, this increase was due to people being evicted for not paying rent. After the tenants were evicted, landlords increased rents and the deposits tripled.
 - 3.2. The region has a constant cycle of residents being evicted from their housing, then needing to enter the process of finding housing again.
 - 3.3. Housing in Klamath & Lake Counties has become unaffordable for much of the population. The cost of living has continued to rise, but wages have not kept pace, resulting in many people being priced out of the market. The few units that are available often charge rents far above the fair market rate. But with the low vacancy rates, residents do not have options.
 - 3.4. Renters are so desperate to find somewhere to live, that they will rent far outside their budget. KCLAS provided an example of a client who receives TANF benefits for \$432 per month being approved for a \$3,000 per month unit. Landlords can then take advantage of COVID assistance which organizations use to pay the arrears.
 - 3.5. Furthermore, the current state of housing is preventing resources from being maximized. For instance, the Klamath Housing Authority had a 40% voucher turnover rate because residents could not find units who would accept their voucher. KLCAS has needed to spend most of their resources on managing the issues of the current market, which has resulted in an unsustainable practice for them.

“We can't continue to serve the same people, when there could be people out there that just lost their job or just aren't as good at navigating the social service system.”

–Klamath and Lake Community Action Services

4. [Landlords take advantage of the local housing demand without accountability.](#) The housing situation in Klamath & Lake Counties has become hostile for residents and the community due to a lack of enforcement of laws and regulations.
 - 4.1. Landlords in this region have started using loopholes to take advantage of renters and set rents far above fair market rate. During COVID, many landlords sold their properties to out-of-state entities who raised rents. Landlords also took advantage of COVID funds by knowingly renting out units to residents they knew would not be able to afford the rent.
 - 4.2. During the eviction moratorium, landlords claimed not to know about it, or claimed that it didn't apply to them. After the eviction moratorium ended, landlords took the opportunity to evict their residents and raised rents and deposits.
 - 4.3. Landlords have also not been held accountable to the laws and policies in place specifically to protect residents. KLCAS mentioned how they had pursued legal services for their clients, but nothing came of it. They can only do so much to advocate for residents before the landlords are held responsible for their actions. Tenants are afraid to take action as well, due to the danger that they could be evicted and placed back into the struggles of finding housing in the region.
5. [There is widespread public apprehension of any new housing development in the region.](#) Housing development projects have experienced major pushback from the community and have had to resort to changing their practices in order to make progress.
 - 5.1. Many residents of Klamath & Lake Counties are vehemently opposed to housing development projects taking place in their area. The NIMBY culture is especially strong in Lakeview, where residents do not want any change, development, or growth to happen in their hometown.
 - 5.2. There is a general fear that if housing is developed, housing-insecure people from Portland will be sent to the area, which will impact the local culture.
 - 5.3. Klamath Housing Authority had tried to develop two housing projects in Lakeview and there was huge public pushback, including against proposed veteran-focused housing. Public efforts to disrupt development went so far as buying land out from under the housing authority, forcing them to change their plans. In general, residents tend to deny the need for housing services in their region and reject all development efforts.
6. [Organizations in this region struggle to hire staff and maintain ongoing programs.](#) Groups are unable to recruit staff to move to their area due to a lack of funding and available housing in the region. Insufficient staffing leaves organizations unable to maintain programs, which impacts the community they serve.

- 6.1. KLCAS was aware of a local position that remained open for over a year, even with national recruitment. Organizations find it challenging to attract and retain staff when there is no housing in the area.
- 6.2. Organizations are also unable to maintain their programs because of an inconsistency of funding. KCLAS received one-time funding infusions to create new programs but did not receive any funding to continue the programs. They cite shifting priorities at the state level as a leading cause.
 - 6.2.1. This pattern does not serve the community, nor is it an effective use of the organization's time to develop projects that will be discontinued. Knowing they might not get funds the following year leaves organizations in a staffing dilemma – whether to overwork the staff they have, or to hire staff and then lay people off. It's important for programs to have funding that makes them sustainable, or to have connections to sustainable funding.
7. [Organizations are open to meeting with OHA.](#) Groups present at this meeting stated that they were unaware of any distrust between organizations and OHA, but discussed what may be beneficial.
 - 7.1. Having a well trusted, local organization act as a host for OHA may encourage other organizations in the region to attend. People in rural areas are very relational, so having a co-hosted model may be beneficial in framing the meeting. Although in-person meetings were the preference, having a hybrid option could also be helpful, as distance may serve as a barrier within the rural region.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. [Assist organizations with carrying out collaborative goals.](#)
 - 1.1. KLCAS identified that receiving help from a state level organization would be helpful in engaging with property managers so that they can begin to form permanent housing cohorts in their region.
2. [Assist organizations with overcoming their local barriers to serving the public.](#)
 - 2.1. Residents in rural areas face elevated barriers to accessing services, including lack of transportation, internet, and cell phone coverage. The community would benefit from assistance to overcome these barriers or helping organizations to overcome these barriers.
3. [Stabilize the housing market and increase available affordable housing options.](#)
 - 3.1. There is a lack of availability of affordable housing in the region. Increasing the supply of affordable housing would ease many of the local challenges.
4. [Enforce regulations for landlords.](#)
 - 4.1. Landlords in this region are acting freely and with impunity, which has a negative impact on residents and related organizations.
5. [Engage with local communities in the pursuit of easing regional opposition to housing development.](#)
 - 5.1. The communities in this region are highly opposed to any development in the area. Engaging the community in the decision-making process, or addressing some of the common misconceptions, may benefit the process.

6. [Provide consistent, multi-year, sustainable funding for projects.](#)
 - 6.1. Organizations would benefit from regular on-going funding, instead of one-time infusions that introduce a degree of uncertainty to projects and staffing.
7. [Work with a community partner when planning meetings.](#)
 - 7.1. Organizations within this region may be more inclined to participate in meetings with OHA if the meeting is being hosted by an organization they trust or have a good relationship with.

IMMEDIATE FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Transformation Wellness Center is seeking approximately \$2.5 million for a building project for a residential treatment center they are in the early stages of developing.