

# An Assessment of the RCORP Kentucky Implementation II and III Grantees Regional Site Visit: February 28, 2023 – March 1, 2023

## KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following key findings and recommendations are based on an evaluation of the Rural Communities Opioid Response Program (RCORP) Kentucky Implementation II and III Grantees Regional Site Visit, convened on February 28, 2023 and March 1, 2023 in Richmond, Kentucky at Eastern Kentucky University's Kit Carson Commons. Forty people from 10 different grantee organizations attended the site visit. Staff from the RCORP technical assistance (TA) provider JBS International and the Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA) organized the site visit. The following key findings are based on a grantee online assessment (n=25) as well as interviews with grantees (n=7), JBS RCORP-TA technical expert leads (TELs) (n=2), and a HRSA project officer (PO).

# **Key Findings**

- Grantees, JBS TELs, and HRSA staff offered very positive evaluations of the site visit, seeing the connections that
  grantees made as its chief success.
- In learning about common challenges and goals at the site visit, grantees developed a spirit of partnership.
   Grantees used the site visit to advise and assist each other and begin to plan substantive collaborations that would meaningfully impact their RCORP core activities.
- Three-quarters of respondents (75.0%, n=18) found grantee presentations extremely or very helpful and 87.0% (n=20) of respondents reported the same of facilitated table discussions.
- Most respondents (70.8% 91.3%) indicated that presentations from the various state agencies were either extremely or very helpful, and the Kentucky Opioid Abatement Advisory Commission's presentation was the most highly rated.
- Three-quarters of respondents (77.3%, n=17) reported finding the café conversations (topic-specific small group discussions) extremely or very helpful, and many described them as one of the most helpful aspects of the site visit.
- A large majority of the 25 respondents (76.0% 92.0%) reported prior awareness of the various state organizations who gave presentations at the site visit, with the exception of the Single State Agency for Substance Use Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery (prior awareness: 44.0%, n=11); (prior engagement: 16.0%, n=4).
- About one-third of respondents reported having no prior engagement with the Kentucky Opioid Response Effort (32.0%, n=8) and the Kentucky Opioid Abatement Commission (36.0%, n=9), and even fewer with the Kentucky Office of Rural Health (40.0%, n=10) and the Kentucky Rural Health Association (52.0%, n=13).
- After the site visit, some grantees shared information, and some collaborated with each other and with state agencies (eg, to advocate with local government to support harm reduction). Interview participants described how these collaborations led them to build on complementary strengths, to reduce duplication of services, and to further expand their service networks.
- Grantees suggested improvements for the site visit that included the following: allow more time for conversation
  and connection between grantees (including breakout sessions that do not include HRSA or JBS staff); spend
  more time on how to apply site visit information, especially from state agencies; and share information about other
  grantees prior to the site visit.

#### Recommendations

**Recommendations for JBS RCORP-TA and HRSA:** Given that this event received a very positive response from grantees, TELs and a PO, and grantees reported positive impacts on their program activities, JBS and HRSA should consider replicating the event in other service areas.

We recommend conducting regional site visits in person, as organizers and participants both noted not only that the site visit facilitated information-sharing and collaboration but also that meeting in person seemed to promote more open and engaged dialogue. When possible, regional site visits should include all RCORP grantees from all cohorts in a geographic area and occur earlier in each project period to foster information sharing and collaboration as early as possible. Regional site visits should include ample opportunity for attendees to participate in small group discussions.

We also recommend providing state-specific orientations to grantees early in the grant process that include information about state agencies working to address substance use disorder or other rural health issues and about other grantees in their state.

Considerations for Evaluation: A formal social network analysis of grantees' relationships could assess the connections between and among grantees and other organizations and how they change over time. This type of analysis could address how and whether TA in the form of site visits or other group events affects the nature, strength, diversity, and density of grantees' ties to each other and to state agencies over time, and in turn how those connections affect their ability to provide services. This longitudinal assessment could also ultimately examine impacts on populations served.

# **BACKGROUND**

In fall 2022, Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA) staff identified that Kentucky Rural Communities Opioid Response Program (RCORP) grantees did not always know or collaborate with each other, even when grantees' service areas overlapped. To better connect Kentucky grantees, staff from the RCORP-TA provider JBS International and HRSA organized the site visit to bring together Kentucky's Implementation grantees. The training objectives for participants were to:

- network and learn about each other's RCORP work,
- see the benefit of collaborating, especially when service areas overlap,
- learn about and connect to state-level programming, and
- consider the sustainability of their RCORP work, especially through opioid abatement funds.

To meet these objectives, the two-day site visit in Richmond, Kentucky included grantee presentations about their RCORP projects, presentations by state agencies about services they provide to address the opioid epidemic, and breakout sessions to facilitate conversations between grantees. In addition, the site visit included optional tours of Liberty Place Recovery Center for Women and the Scholar Program at the Kit Carson Commons.

There were 10 grantees represented at the site visit in addition to their HRSA Project Officers (POs) and several Technical Expert Leads (TELs) from JBS International, the TA provider for the RCORP program. Three TA evaluators from the WWAMI Rural Health Research Center (RHRC) also attended and observed the site visit. The site visit began at noon on Tuesday, February 28 and finished at 4:30 PM on Wednesday, March 1.



# **PURPOSE**

This report presents the findings of an evaluation of the TA provided to grantee attendees through the Rural Communities Opioid Response Program (RCORP) Kentucky Implementation II and III Regional Site Visit held in Richmond, Kentucky on February 28, 2023 and March 1, 2023.

## **METHODS**

Three RHRC RCORP-TA Evaluation Team members attended the site visit to get a sense of the activities and design an appropriate evaluation protocol.

After the event, the RHRC RCORP-TA Evaluation Team emailed attendees an invitation to complete an online assessment of the site visit about the value of the activities, knowledge of and prior engagement with state organizations, what was most helpful, and suggestions for improvement. Non-responding attendees received up to three additional emails reminding them to complete the assessment.

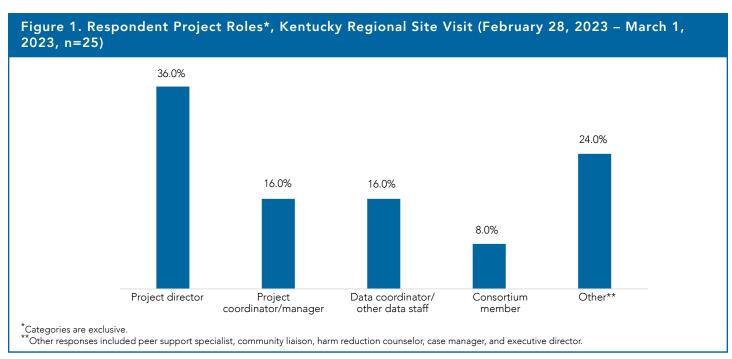
We also invited attendees to participate in a short (15- to 30-minute) semi-structured, qualitative interview. Grantees described connections made at the site visit, follow-up with connections since, what they learned and how their organization would use those learnings, and opinions about the site visit. HRSA and JBS staff described site visit goals, how the visit related to their grantees' work, site visit primary successes, and impact on future work. Seven individuals from four grantee organizations, two JBS TELs, and one HRSA PO completed interviews.

See the Technical Appendix for details on the analysis.

# **FINDINGS**

# Findings from the Online Assessment

Of 40 attendees from 10 Implementation grantees, 25 (62.5%) responded to the online assessment. Respondent roles are shown in Figure 1, with project directors (36.0%, n=9) being the most common.

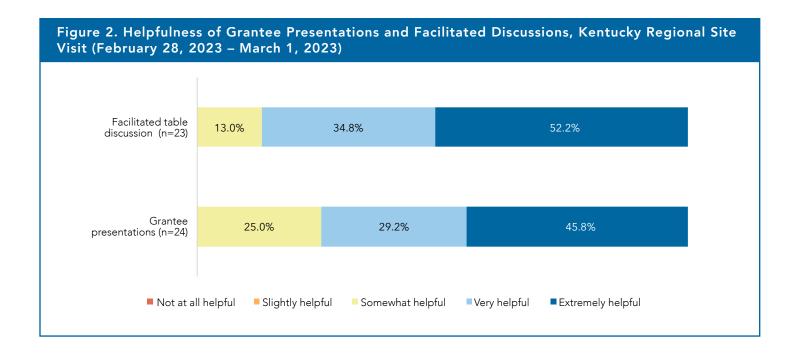




## **Day 1: Grantee Presentations and Facilitated Discussions**

Each grantee gave a short presentation and overview of their grant activities to start the site visit. Figure 2 shows respondent ratings of helpfulness of the presentations. Three-quarters (75.0%, n=18) of respondents rated these presentations extremely or very helpful. These presentations were followed by an informal conversation among grantees facilitated by JBS TELs. Grantees attending from the same organization were asked to split up for these conversations, where attendees could ask one another questions. These facilitated conversations were also very well received: 87.0% (n=20) reported they were extremely or very helpful.

"Listening to the Kentucky grantees present their projects was invaluably helpful. The connection with other grantees made the need for collaboration exceptionally clear and encouraged ongoing collaboration as vital for sustainability of the projects long term. It was unifying, truly! Thank you for organizing this site visit." – Kentucky Implementation Grantee



#### **Day 2: Group Conversations**

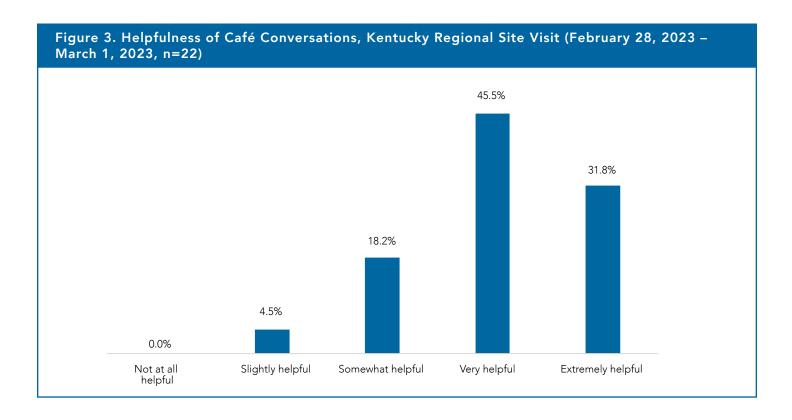
On the second day of the site visit attendees participated in two different group conversations. The first session, a café conversation, consisted of four small-group breakout sessions with facilitated open discussion covering different topics.

More than half of respondents (56.5%, n=13) attended the prevention session, roughly 20% (21.7%, n=5) attended the session on stigma reduction, 3 (13.0%) attended the collaborative opportunities session, and 2 (8.7%) attended the session on recovery/involvement of those with lived experiences. Figure 3 shows respondent overall ratings of the helpfulness of the café conversations. All respondents who attended the stigma reduction, collaborative opportunities,

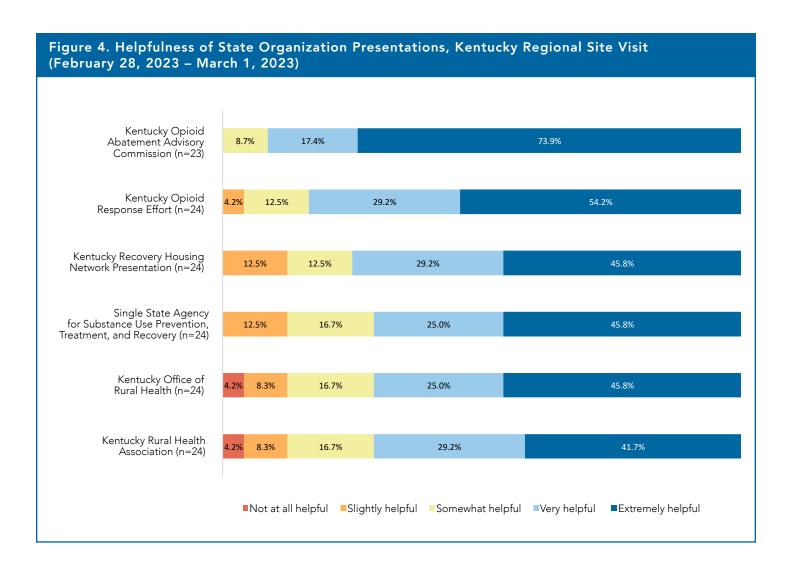
"I enjoyed the breakout sessions. I felt that it allowed for more casual, brainstorming conversations to occur." – Kentucky Implementation Grantee



and recovery/involvement of those with lived experience sessions found them to be extremely or very helpful, and 61.6% (n=8) of those who attended the prevention session found it to be extremely or very helpful. The second conversation was a large-group discussion on lessons learned and next steps at the end of the site visit.



Representatives from a variety of state organizations including the Kentucky Recovery Housing Network; the Single State Agency for Substance Use Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery; the Kentucky Opioid Response Effort (KORE); the Kentucky Rural Health Association; the Kentucky Office of Rural Health; and the Kentucky Opioid Abatement Advisory Commission gave presentations and took questions from grantees. Nearly three-quarters (73.9%, n=17) of respondents rated the presentation by the Chair and Executive Director of the Opioid Abatement Advisory Commission as extremely helpful, the most highly rated presentation. More than two-thirds of respondents (70.8% - 83.4%) reported that the other state organizations' presentations were extremely or very helpful. Between 4.1% (n=1) and 12.5% (n=3) of respondents found the other state agency presentations either not at all helpful or only slightly helpful. (Figure 4).



# Awareness of and Prior Engagement with State Organizations

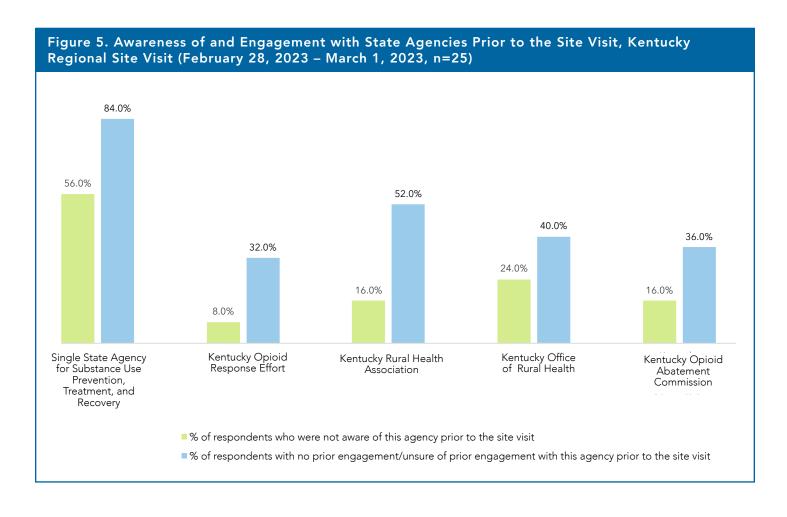
Figure 5 displays respondents' awareness of and prior engagement with the state organizations represented at the site visit. More than half of respondents (56.0%, n=14) reported that, prior to the site visit, they were not aware of the Single State

Agency for Substance Use Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery, and 84.0% (n=21) either had no previous engagement or were unaware of previous engagement with this organization. More than three-quarters of respondents were aware of the other state organizations that presented at the site visit, and prior engagement with these organizations ranged from less than one-third (32.0%, n=8) to a little more than half of respondents (52.0%, n=13).

"The state presentations were a good idea, but too much was describing the agency and not enough for how we could leverage their resources -- what are the actual points of connection?"

– Kentucky Implementation Grantee





# Optional Tours of Liberty Place and Kit Carson Commons

At the end of each day of the site visit, an optional tour was offered to attendees. Sites included Liberty Place Recovery Center for Women and the Kit Carson Commons and Scholar Program. The five respondents who reported touring Liberty Place and four who reported touring the Kit Carson Commons and Scholar Program rated them extremely or very helpful.

# How Grantees Made Connections During and After the Site Visit

In interviews, grantees reported on the ways in which they connected during the site visit and how the site visit influenced their work afterward as they continued to communicate and work together.

Interviewees reported connecting in various ways with each other and with state agencies during the site visit (Table 1). Interviewees said that they met new individuals and organizations that they previously had not known, developed existing relationships, learned more about each other and state agencies, learned that other grantees were facing the same issues, felt affirmed about their work, and advised and offered assistance to each other. Interviewees also reported beginning to see each other as partners, where previously they had seen themselves as operating alone or as in competition with each other.



Table 1. Reported Benefits of Connecting at the Kentucky Grantees Site Visit (February 28, 2023 – March 1, 2023)

Theme	Example quotes
Making new connections: connecting to individuals and organizations that interviewees previously had not known	"No, I didn't really know [that site visit attendee] previously. I mean,I knew their organization just because I'm from here and I've always heard about them. But to actually put a face with the company and to be able to kind of like, know more about what they offer and what they do, that was all new."
Developing existing connections, allowing interviewees to feel more comfortable interacting or to follow up on shared endeavors	"[I]t's very big to people like me that are out in the field, meeting the people [eg, staff of state agencies] that we talk to on the computer or that's in the email and meeting them in person and seeing them as people, when we're just emailing and they're saying, 'What about this?' What about this?' We see them as kind of holding the purse strings, you know what I mean? And we're a little cautious on how tointeract. I think putting the faces and names together, meeting them on a personal level helped tremendouslyI will utilize that because I'm now reaching out to people that I didn't reach out to before. 'Cause I see 'em as a human."
Learning more about other grantees' work	"I think mostly from that meetingthere was lots of great information. Like the gals who were working in the jails and that seven-county area - [I] thought that was pretty amazing work that they were doing."
Learning about services and programs available at the state level	"I learned a lot about [the Kentucky Office of Rural Health], all of the trainings and stuff that they can help with because we fund things at our [Federally Qualified Health Center], but grant writing,they have a grant writing workshop, billing and coding bootcamp, mental health first aid."
Seeing that other grantees were facing the same issues	"[T]hese are the problems I'm having and the problems that people mentioned were exactly the same problems that other people were having. I'm not sure anyone ever came up with any solution, but it's always kind of helpful to hear that. Yeah, we're struggling with these same road bumps."
Feeling affirmed about how one was doing one's work, or how one's organization was doing its work	"I felt like a positive affirmation about what we're doing, that it felt like, yeah, we're kind of on the right track. Seems like this, the activities we're engaged in are the appropriate ones for our community. So it was just kind of self-reinforcing in a way that I think was positive."
Getting or giving specific advice or assistance	"[T]hey [participants in the breakout session] were very helpful in saying, maybe, [when you are doing outreach], you shouldn't just go to the pastor [who is not interested in harm reduction]Talk to people that's in the congregation, you know, just say, 'Hey, do you go to this church? You know, this is what we're trying to do, what do you think about that?' You know, starting small. And that was helpful. That was really helpful."
Talking about, or planning, future collaboration	"[T]here is a new group [grantee] They have a recovery center that's more along the lines of sober housing And what I was telling 'em was that we certainly understood what it meant to start from scratch because I [had led a similar organization]. So if they needed help, if they had questions about odd things that might come up to please call and let us know. We would be happy to talk with them."
Feeling a sense of partnership with other grantees rather than isolation or competition	"RCORP was definitely something that just is helping to bridge the gaps. A lot of times in behavioral health, I think there's kind of turf wars going on where, you know, people don't want to necessarily refer out, or they just want to keep theirs to their own, so to speak. And I think, I think there was an overall feeling [at the site visit] that we were all, we were all in the same fight together, regardless of where an individual [who uses substances] goes [for services]."
	"I think we just talked about collaborating more. Again, like, we're not all islands. We don't have to function alone. Like even though, you know, some ofthe people in my group may been from [another part of] Kentucky, we still can collaborate and come up with ideas and, and ideas to how we network with others and, and help just bridge those gaps here in our community."



When discussing their work after the site visit, interviewees described continuing conversations and planning, or beginning to implement shared work with other grantees and with state agencies (Table 2). This shared work included efforts to reduce duplication of services among grantees, working together to strengthen their organizations' capacity (eg, through training), and working together to refer individual clients with substance use disorder to each other's agencies. Grantees also discussed working with state agencies to advocate for and educate grantee communities.

Table 2. Connecting and Collaborating after the Kentucky Grantees Site Visit (February 28, 2023 – March 1, 2023)

Theme	Example quotes
Continuing conversations with other grantees through informal conversations and planned, formal meetings	"[T]here's another [person I met at the site visit] that I've been texting and calling back and forth with We've been sharing ideas and several emails and what works, what didn't work. And that's been very helpful."
	"[We plan to] get together and have a joint staff meeting and see what we can do [in collaboration with another grantee]." $\ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \ \$
	"[Another grantee] put on [an event] since [the site visit] and we have set up booths and tables. We've been very present."
Building on program strengths and differences/reducing duplication of efforts	"We were talking more about trying to work closer with the hospital[nearby], simply because we're really good at prevention, but they're really good at treatment. We've got recovery down, but they've got treatment down. And so what we're going to try to do is work closer so that we're able to meet all of the needs within the area I think that [the head of our organization and the head of theirs] are trying to organize a meeting now with both staffs to see how we can work a little bit more hand-in-hand to meet all of the needs of [the city] as a whole and [the county]."
Thinking about how to use or adapt others' strategies for one's own organization	"[I]t's nice to, you know, learn tricks of the trade, I guess you may say, from others and how they have found ways to meet needs that's innovative and I guess cheaper"
Working with another organization to improve capacity	"[T]here's gonna be two people from the [site visit] that are going to be taking MRT [moral recognition therapy training, which would allow a grantee entrée into schools to provide prevention services] through Northern Kentucky University [another grantee] at the end of this month."
	"They [another site visit participant] have a grant writing workshop [that someone from our organization might take]."
Referring clients to other organizations at the site visit	"I think that [the site visit] provided me with new resourcesFor an example, there's a lady who I was able to connect with[who] connects people to Medicaid So being able to have those types of contacts, and to be able to really develop a relationship with them so that I can send people to them so that they can get the help that they need is a huge deal for me and my job."
Planning to build networks with grantees and other organizations	"I thinkthat goes back to building those networks [in the future], working with other organizations to bridge those gaps. 'Causeour agency and program can't do everything ourself, but instead of trying to cover a little bit of all the needed resources in the community, if we can focus on one area, partner with another agency that has a better focus or already has aim at maybe how they may [address an issue that matters for our clients], I [will] resource out to them when I've got a client instead of me trying to figure out how am I going to provide [the needed service]."
Working with state agency to educate and advocate with local communities and local government	"Probably my most excitable connection is with [a state official]who is going to link up with me and go out with me personally, to help deliver services to the counties I work in to talk to city officials, um, trying to get harm reduction into the counties we're gonna be talking about Narcan training, possible needle exchange, just education in general."



## Overall Feedback about the Site Visit

Through open-ended responses on the online assessment and interviews, participants largely expressed very positive opinions about the site visit, finding the following elements helpful:

- Connecting with and learning about other grantees and state agencies
- Conversations facilitated through breakout sessions (café conversations and facilitated table discussions)
- Presentations that taught interviewees about grantee and state agency work
- Learning about resources, such as state funds and information sources
- Excellent facilitation by JBS International TA staff

## **Suggested Improvements**

Some grantees suggested the following improvements:

- Allow more time for conversation and connection between grantees
- Plan ahead by submitting questions and sharing information about the other grantees before the site visit
- Provide more opportunities to meet others after the site visit
- Create smaller groups for discussion
- Spend more time on how to apply information, especially from state agencies
- Plan some breakout sessions without JBS and HRSA staff present to allow more open conversations

"The entire site visit was a home run. Tons of engagement, fantastic grantee presentations, and top-notch networking opportunities. We are grateful to share the stage with so many wonderful organizations doing similar work in their communities."

- Kentucky Implementation Grantee

"I think one of the things that stuck out most to me was, like JBS..., what a well-oiled machine and everyone, within those agencies, ...I think I was just blown away by how smart they were. I mean, they knew everything." - Kentucky Implementation Grantee

# Technical Expert Lead (TEL) and Project Officer (PO) Reflections

The TELs and PO interviewed thought that the primary success of the visit was bringing grantees together to network and learn from each other, and they described how grantees moved their projects forward through connections that they made at this meeting. For example, one grantee with expertise in prevention and another with expertise in treatment planned collaboration after the meeting, and multiple grantees agreed that they would partner together in UNSHAME Kentucky, a statewide anti-stigma campaign.

TEL and PO interviewees made the following suggestions to improve similar site visits in the future:

- Offer more stretch breaks between presentations
- Convene grantees for this type of regional site visit earlier in the grant period than was the case for Implementation II grants, which are set to end in August 2023
- Bring together all RCORP grantees in a state, not just one type of grantee (ie, not just Implementation grantees)
- Set time aside for TELs/POs to visit their own grantees after the all-grantee meeting
- Replicate this type of site visit in other states



## SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## **Summary**

When evaluating their experiences of the site visit, grantees used almost entirely positive language, and few offered suggestions for improvement. About half of online assessment respondents found the grantee presentations and facilitated table discussions to be extremely helpful, consistent with grantee, TEL, and PO comments about the value of connecting with and learning from other grantees. The site visit allowed grantees to network with each other and with state agencies, making new connections, and developing existing connections. Through presentations and breakout groups, grantees learned about each other's services and services available through state agencies, saw how other grantees faced similar challenges, learned ways to solve common problems from each other, and envisioned how they might partner with each other.

Most online assessment respondents reported that presentations from various state agencies were extremely or very helpful. While more than three-quarters of respondents had prior knowledge of the Kentucky Opioid Response Effort, the Kentucky Rural Health Association, the Kentucky Office of Rural Health, and the Kentucky Opioid Abatement Commission before the site visit, more than half of respondents were not aware of the Single State Agency for Substance Use Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery. The small number of respondents who reported that these presentations were not helpful also reported having prior knowledge of the agencies, which suggests that the information presented may not have been new to some of the attendees of the site visit. One grantee mentioned that they felt the presentations were too descriptive and did not provide enough information on how to connect with the agencies.

The site visit generated follow-up among grantees that appeared to have tangible consequences for their core RCORP grant activities. Grantees reconnected formally and informally after the site visit, planning to refer clients to each other and strategize about shared endeavors that would build on each other's strengths. Grantees also planned to work with state agencies to educate and advocate with local communities and government, eg, by organizing a meeting between a state official and local officials to promote local support of harm reduction services. Since the site visit, monthly peer-to-peer TA calls have been scheduled for Kentucky grantees, an example of a way that JBS RCORP-TA can help facilitate connections with grantees in the same region and similar service areas. This raises the question of whether to schedule regional peer-to-peer calls earlier in the grant process to help foster connections between grantees.

## Recommendations

**Recommendations for JBS RCORP-TA and HRSA:** Given that this event received a very positive response from grantees, TELs and a PO, and grantees reported positive impacts on their program activities, JBS and HRSA should consider replicating the event in other service areas.

We recommend conducting regional site visits in person, as organizers and participants both noted not only that the site visit facilitated information sharing and collaboration but also that meeting in person seemed to promote more open and engaged dialogue. When possible, regional site visits should include all RCORP grantees from all cohorts in a geographic area and occur earlier in each project period to foster information sharing and collaboration as early as possible. Regional site visits should include ample opportunity for attendees to participate in small group discussions.



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Considerations for Evaluation: A formal social network analysis of grantees' relationships could assess the connections between and among grantees and other organizations and how they change over time. This type of analysis could address how and whether TA in the form of site visits or other group events affects the nature, strength, diversity, and density of grantees' ties to each other and to state agencies over time, and in turn how those connections affect their ability to provide services. This longitudinal assessment could also ultimately examine impacts on populations served.

# **TECHNICAL APPENDIX**

## Qualitative Methods

Interviews were professionally transcribed. We analyzed qualitative data using a team-based approach. First, one reviewer analyzed all interviews, creating and assigning an initial set of codes to segments of text to summarize and interpret the text's meaning. Next, a second reviewer reviewed a subset of two interviews using the initial coding scheme, suggesting where additional or different codes might be valuable to achieve consensus and ensure a full analysis. Finally, the first reviewer created a revised coding scheme and applied it to all transcripts. The revised scheme organized codes into a hierarchy of themes. Each theme expressed the views of two or more individuals.

#### **AUTHORS**

C. Holly A. Andrilla, MS, WWAMI Rural Health Research Center, University of Washington S.G. Miller, PhD, WWAMI Rural Health Research Center, University of Washington Signe E. Burchim, MS, WWAMI Rural Health Research Center, University of Washington Gina A. Keppel, MPH, WWAMI Rural Health Research Center, University of Washington Davis G. Patterson, PhD, WWAMI Rural Health Research Center, University of Washington

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University of Washington • School of Medicine Box 354982 • Seattle WA 98195-4982 phone: (206) 685-0402 • fax: (206) 616-4768 https://familymedicine.uw.edu/rhrc/

