

A Brief Evaluation of the RCORP-TA Ask-a-Grantee Sessions: March – June 2023

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following key findings and recommendations are based on a brief evaluation of the “Ask-a-Grantee” technical assistance (TA) sessions, held monthly from March – June 2023 by the Rural Communities Opioid Response Program (RCORP)-TA provider JBS International. The RCORP-TA Evaluation Team at the WWAMI Rural Health Research Center (RHRC) conducted this evaluation.

Key Findings

- “Ask-a-Grantee” sessions attendance ranged from 3 (18.8%) grantee participants who were not the featured presenters (hereafter referred to as “non-presenting grantees”) in June, to 12 (42.9%) non-presenting grantee participants in March. For all sessions included in this evaluation, non-presenting grantees made up less than half of those in attendance. Staff from JBS and HRSA made up the largest proportion of attendees at three of the four (75.0%) of the sessions evaluated.
- Session descriptions from emails, newsletters, and the RCORP-TA portal calendar lacked sufficient detail for grantees to discern whether attending the session would be beneficial to them.
- In the sessions that WWAMI RHRC evaluators observed, engagement from participants was limited in one session and nonexistent in the other.

Recommendations

- To increase grantee attendance, we recommend providing more detail to prospective participants about the topic of “Ask-a-Grantee” sessions and exploring alternative ways to publicize the sessions.
- To increase participant engagement, we recommend that facilitators have pre-determined questions to ask to engage participants if they do not have any questions.
- We recommend further evaluation in the following areas:
 - 1) Further evaluations of the “Ask-a-Grantee” sessions should include understanding the value to JBS International and Health Resources & Service Administration (HRSA) personnel, who were the majority of attendees.
 - 2) Further evaluation of the “Rural Roads RCORPodcast” “Ask-a-Grantee” episodes to assess grantee listenership and satisfaction to determine whether the podcast format is more successful in reaching other grantees than the Q&A session format, or if other formats should be explored.

BACKGROUND

The RCORP technical assistance (TA) provider JBS International hosts monthly “Ask-a-Grantee” videoconferences featuring a Rural Communities Opioid Response Program (RCORP) grantee. The 45-minute Q&A session is co-moderated by JBS Technical Expert Leads (TELs) and a Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA) staff member. The format includes a short presentation by grantee and/or consortium members who share information about the activities of their grant. Following this presentation, attendees are invited to comment or ask questions of the grantee. Scheduled information about upcoming sessions is included in the RCORP-TA monthly newsletter, the RCORP-TA portal, and in email notifications. This evaluation memo focuses on the “Ask-a-Grantee” sessions that occurred from March – June 2023.

METHODS

Data Sources and Measures

The RCORP-TA Evaluation Team at the WWAMI Rural Health Research Center (RHRC) used online registration and attendance sheets to identify the number and organizations of attendees at the March – June 2023 “Ask-a-Grantee” sessions. RHRC team members also attended the April and May sessions.

FINDINGS

Total session attendance ranged from 16 in April and June to 28 in March. Non-presenting grantee participants made up less than half of attendees at all sessions, ranging from 18.8% (n=3) in June to 44.4% (n=8) in May. Staff from JBS International and HRSA made up anywhere from one-third (33.3%, n=6 in May) to nearly two-thirds (62.5%, n=10 in June) of attendees. In the March, April, and June sessions, more staff from JBS International and HRSA attended than non-presenting grantees, who were the primary intended audience (Table 1). RHRC team members observed two “Ask-a-Grantee” sessions, with limited engagement in one session and no engagement in the other.

Table 1. Attendance Counts for the “Ask-a-Grantee” RCORP Technical Assistance Sessions (March – June 2023)

Session	# of session participants	JBS staff	HRSA staff	Presenters	Non-presenting grantee participants
March Ask-a-Grantee Session: United Way of the Wabash Valley, Inc. (Psychostimulant Support II)	28	42.9% (n=12)	7.1% (n=2)	7.1% (n=2)	42.9% (n=12)
April Ask-a-Grantee Session: Oklahoma State University (Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome)	16	50.0% (n=8)	0.0% (n=0)	25.0% (n=4)	25.0% (n=4)
May Ask-a-Grantee Session: Mississippi Hospital Association (Implementation II)	18	27.8% (n=5)	5.6% (n=1)	22.2% (n=4)	44.4% (n=8)
June Ask-a-Grantee Session: Emma L. Bixby Medical Center (Implementation II)	16	37.5% (n=6)	25.0% (n=4)	18.8% (n=3)	18.8% (n=3)

Table 2 includes links to the RCORP-TA portal calendar events for each session, all of which use a generic description about the format of the session, with limited or no information on grantee projects to be shared. Generic descriptions about session format were also used to advertise the event in the RCORP-TA newsletter and emails sent out about the event. RHRC evaluators were not aware of other means of advertising. See an example of the generic “Ask-a-Grantee” session description below:

“You are invited to the April RCORP-TA ‘Ask-a-Grantee’ Live session. The monthly RCORP-TA ‘Ask-a-Grantee’ Live is an opportunity for RCORP grantees across each of the cohorts to drop in and ask questions of their fellow grantees. Co-moderated by JBS TELs and HRSA POs, these featured grantees will be highlighted in the monthly RCORP-TA Newsletter and participate in these live Q&A sessions over Zoom.”

Table 2. Session Descriptions of “Ask-a-Grantee” RCORP Technical Assistance Sessions (March – June 2023)

Month and featured grantee	Link to session description
March Ask-a-Grantee Session: United Way of the Wabash Valley, Inc. (Psychostimulant Support II)	https://www.rcorp-ta.org/events/march-ask-grantee-session-united-way-wabash-valley-psychostimulant-support-ii
April Ask-a-Grantee Session: Oklahoma State University (Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome)	https://www.rcorp-ta.org/events/april-ask-grantee-session-oklahoma-state-university-nas-0
May Ask-a-Grantee Session: Mississippi Hospital Association (Implementation II)	https://www.rcorp-ta.org/events/may-ask-grantee-session-mississippi-hospital-association-implementation-ii
June Ask-a-Grantee Session: Emma L. Bixby Medical Center (Implementation II)	https://www.rcorp-ta.org/events/june-ask-grantee-session-emma-l-bixby-medical-center-implementation-ii

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion

There were more staff from JBS and HRSA present at three of the four “Ask-a-Grantee” sessions evaluated than there were non-presenting grantee participants, who were the primary audience of the TA events. We have identified lack of sufficient description of session topics as a possible reason for low attendance at “Ask-a-Grantee” sessions. The session description details only the session format and does not provide prospective attendees with any background on the presenting grantee, or what might be discussed during the session. Providing grantees with more detailed information about the session content may increase attendance and attract grantees for which the topic is most relevant. In addition to the insufficient description of the event, advertising for these sessions was limited to advertisement through the RCORP-TA portal calendar, RCORP-TA newsletter, and email notifications. It is possible that the RCORP-TA team relayed information about these sessions to grantees in other formats, but there may be a missed opportunity for better advertising to increase grantee participation. Session organizers could explore other means of advertising to increase “Ask-a-Grantee” session attendance.

“Ask-a-Grantee” sessions were advertised as Q&A events, but engagement was limited to nonexistent in sessions observed by RHRC evaluators. In addition to introducing the presenter, session facilitators could prepare a list of questions and conversation starters to improve participant engagement. When queried about other TA events, grantees have reported a desire for opportunities to connect with other grantees.¹ Given this, we recommend either modifying the current format, or considering a different format for sharing the work of individual grantees. “Ask-a-Grantee” sessions are also offered via “Rural Roads – The RCORPodcast.” Further evaluation could assess the listenership of these podcast episodes to assess whether the podcast format is more successful in reaching other grantees.

Recommendations

Increase Attendance

We recommend providing more detail to prospective participants about the topic of “Ask-a-Grantee” sessions and exploring alternative ways to publicize the sessions to increase attendance.

Increase Engagement

To increase grantee engagement, we recommend that facilitators have pre-determined questions to engage participants if they do not have any questions.

Further Evaluation

We recommend further evaluation in the following areas:

- 1) Further evaluation to understand the value of attending “Ask-a-Grantee” sessions to JBS and HRSA personnel, who were the majority of attendees.
- 2) Further evaluation of the “Rural Roads RCORPodcast” “Ask-a-Grantee” episodes to assess grantee listenership and satisfaction to determine whether the podcast format is more successful in reaching other grantees than the Q&A session format, or if other formats should be explored.

REFERENCES

1. Woolcock SC, Burchim SE, Patterson DG, Andrilla CHA. *Rural Communities Opioid Response Program (RCORP) Technical Assistance (TA) 2023 Grantee Survey*. Evaluation Brief. WWAMI Rural Health Research Center, University of Washington; July 2023.

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