

MOFAS Community Grants Program
Grantee Interview Report #1 *(Phase 1)*

Reflections on Regional Community Networks

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By

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PDA conducted interviews in July 2006, with grant staff from each of the six MOFAS-funded organizations. The purpose of the interviews was to obtain a more detailed understanding of how regional community networks are being formed and how they are functioning as of the end of the second quarter of Phase I of the grant-funding period. This report provides an initiative-wide overview of RCN membership, structure and operating logistics, describes the extent to which grantee RCNs fulfill important aspects of MOFAS' vision for the community grants program and includes a discussion that highlights important areas for focus, training and oversight in Year 2.

The following is an overview of interview results:

- First-points-of-contact from a variety of sectors are being recruited
- Grantees are successfully involving people and agencies that are experienced with FASD; some grantees have begun to forge connections between these entities
- Partnerships are also being formed with influential persons
- Most grantees report working with partners with whom they have worked previously and have worked to fill gaps in representation
- Each grantee RCN has a unique structure, is in a different stage of development and operates in a different manner
- Collaboration between RCN members is limited
- Grantees have differing perceptions about how RCN members should contribute
- Plans for sustainability have not yet been fully delineated
- Education of professionals around FASD is a primary strategy for creating change
- Grantees need to flesh out or more clearly articulate their theory of change
- Emerging needs have created shifts in grantee focus
- Overall, the status of RCN development is appropriate for grants that are midway through their first year

This report highlights the strengths of the community grants, as well as some gaps and challenges identified during Year 1. While these issues are not of major concern at this early stage in the initiative, they do, however, highlight important areas for focus, training, and oversight in Year 2. Based on the interview findings, PDA makes these recommendations for MOFAS and for grantees to consider as the programs continue to mature:

- Grantees may need to more clearly articulate their theories for how systematic changes will occur as a result of their efforts
- Professional education efforts need to expand beyond educating individual professionals to providing tools to help create agency-level and systems-level change

MOFAS Grantee Interview Report #1 (Phase I)

- MOFAS and grantees should plan Year 2 and Year 3 activities to reflect continued maturation of the programs (concentrate less on introductory activities and more on creating sustainability)
- MOFAS should consider whether grantees who use a “silo” approach should work to develop fuller collaborative relationships within the region
- MOFAS should draft a memo that clarifies their expectations for collaboration within the RCNs, and share this information with grantees
- As programs continue to mature MOFAS will need to continue providing reminders of the MOFAS grant vision until it is clearly understood by all grantees
- MOFAS can also make a determination of “vision match” (how well the RCN reflects MOFAS’s intended vision) on an individual grant basis, and work with grantees as necessary to help steer them in the right direction.

These findings are explained in greater detail in the body of the attached report.

INTRODUCTION

Since the creation, maintenance and strengthening of regional community networks is the primary strategy of the MOFAS funding initiative, it is important to understand how grantee networks are being formed and utilized as the initiative progresses. In order to get a better understanding of grantees' regional community networks (RCN) structures and functions and how they have progressed between Phase I and Phase III of the grant, PDA plans to conduct interviews with grantees, RCN members and others impacted by grantee FASD efforts.

In July 2006, PDA started this process by conducting phone interviews with grant staff from each of the six MOFAS-funded organizations. During the interviews, grantees were asked about the current membership, structure, and functioning of their RCN as well as their vision for what they would like to see their RCN accomplish (see attached Overview of Grantee Interviews document). PDA then used this information to create individual reports describing each grantee's RCN and comparing them to MOFAS' vision for the RCN and the grantee's vision of the RCN as described in their grant proposal (see Appendix for individual reports).

The purpose of this report is to provide MOFAS with a broader, statewide or initiative-wide description of RCN membership, functioning, structure and grantee vision for RCN accomplishments. The report also provides a critical reflection on the extent to which MOFAS' and grantees' visions for the initiative coincide. Recommendations are also provided that may assist MOFAS in its efforts to ensure that grantee RCNs will be successful in creating long-term, sustainable changes to FASD prevention, intervention, identification, diagnosis, treatment and support infrastructure.

What is a regional community network? MOFAS developed its community grants initiative with the assistance of a grants planning consultant. Through a collaborative process with stakeholders, MOFAS identified "regional community networks" as the key goal and strategy of the grants initiative. As articulated in the funding philosophy¹ for the initiative, regional community networks are groups of partnering agencies and organizations that include representation from various sectors. The goal of creating a regional network is to build regional capacity based on existing infrastructure. This represents the best way to sustain efforts over time. The networks may be more or less formal, but must have a history of collaborative partnership. Regions are to be defined by the grant.

It is important to note that the form of the regional community network is relatively undefined. It is simply a group of "partnering agencies" with a history of collaboration, but with no requirements of formality. The network must cover a region defined by the grant. The funding philosophy does not dictate whether the group acts as advisors, breaks down into work groups, or meets face-to-face. The most important aspect of the regional community network is its goal: to build regional capacity to address FASD based on existing infrastructure in order to create sustainable change over time.

¹ Statement of Funding Philosophy for the Minnesota Statewide Initiative on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) Community Grant Program. June, 2005

PDA has used the definition of regional community networks from the funding philosophy to assess each of the grantees, the findings of which are below:

RESULTS

RCN Membership

A key strategy of this initiative is “to bring the right people to the table.” Grants are expected to assess the capacity of existing agencies to address FASD, and to recruit membership based both on the strengths and the needs within their region. Grants should seek to build or expand their RCN to include professionals or laypersons that: represent a variety of sectors, have a history of working within the field of FASD, have available resources and influence within the region, and have a history of collaboration. Through conducting interviews with all six grantees, PDA was able to examine RCN membership. The results below provide an initiative-wide overview of grantee RCNs as they were after the second quarter of Phase I.

First-points-of-contact from a variety of sectors are being recruited

Most grantees have recruited members or partners with a focus on obtaining professional and lay representation that spans the whole spectrum of FASD prevention, intervention, identification, diagnosis and support services. For the most part, they appear to have an understanding of whom they need to recruit; however, for some grantees their understanding of who should be involved has changed slightly as they get a better grasp of who the players are in their area. Although most grantees have been successful in bringing the right people to the table, representation from some sectors has been elusive due to barriers such as trying to contact representatives within closed government bureaucracies, and the politically sensitive nature of working in FASD and peoples’ busy schedules.

Grantees are successfully involving people and agencies that are experienced with FASD; some grantees have begun to forge connections between these entities

Most grantees are attempting to identify and recruit laypersons affected by FASD and representatives from agencies or entities that are currently working to address FASD within their region, whether through prevention, identification and diagnosis, or intervention and support. Some grantees have made it clear that they are looking to forge links between these entities that typically operate in isolation of each other by having them physically interact as part of the RCN. On the other hand, some grantees are solely interested in identifying entities and informing each one of the existence / service provided by the others (e.g. through a resource / referral guide). While all grantees have articulated the importance of making connections or identifying these entities, not all have a strategic plan for doing so. For example, one grantee is subcontracting with two other agencies to carry out grant activities. And, another grantee doesn’t have a well-delineated plan for who they would like to have on their RCN, but has been recruiting a variety of people to conduct grant-related activities and hopes that they will help form an RCN.

Partnerships are also being formed with influential persons

Several grantees have also identified and attempted to involve people that have influence, connections or resources that can help advance changes in the FASD spectrum of services, but

who may not be directly involved in providing FASD prevention or intervention services (e.g. legislators; tribal and county government officials, school systems).

Most grantees report working with partners with whom they have worked previously and have worked to fill gaps in representation

Most grantees are involving or recruiting people or entities into their RCN with whom they have worked on past projects. While these existing groups of people have formed the backbone of several grantee RCNs, grantees have also actively sought out representation or partnerships with additional or newly identified entities that will help them gain a more well-rounded perspective of FASD prevention and intervention.

In conclusion, the RCN memberships are formative and still emerging. However, grantees' visions for their RCNs appear to be on the right track and their progress after six months of funding is good.

Structure & Operating Logistics of Grantee RCNs

Each grantee RCN has a unique structure, is in a different stage of development and operates in a different manner. The following chart provides a summary description of each grantee's RCN:

MOFAS Grantee	Aspects of Structure & Logistics			
	Groups Formed	Current stage of Development	Meeting Logistics	Likelihood that all or a majority of RCN members will meet together as a whole
Clinic & Community Connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ RCN ▪ Smaller workgroup (sub-group of RCN members) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Still adding members to the RCN ▪ Workgroups are actively coming together and conducting the work of the grant ▪ Still looking for new recruits to round-out representation 	The workgroup may meet more than one time / quarter on an as-needed basis	Not very likely at this point; CCC appears to be recruiting and utilizing individual members as necessary (e.g. those with knowledge or influence regarding a particular grant-related activity)
FASD-RN— Ramsey & Wash. Cos.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ RCN ▪ Smaller steering committee (sub-group of RCN members) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The RCN has not met yet 	Steering committed will guide the RCN, how & when the RCN will meet is still TBD	Very likely; a meeting is scheduled for Sept 14
Lakewood	Project Coordinator joined and attends meetings of existing networks in the region	Project Coordinator has become a member of several networks	Tries to meet with each network quarterly	Not likely
Northland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 3 main agencies: (1 fiscal agent; 2 	Formed and meeting	Full group meets 3-4 times a year; small group as	Full group has already met

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ sub-grantees) ▪ Advisory Committee ▪ Workgroups 		needed	
Project Harmony	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ RCN ▪ Smaller workgroup 	Reconfirmed commitment from persons previously partnered with; added new members to fill gaps; still would like representation from a few more entities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ RCN (as a whole) met 2 times in second quarter ▪ Workgroups form to help Project Coordinator with quarterly tasks (whomever has time to help) 	Full group has already met
White Earth	No group formed yet	No group meetings have occurred yet, but people have been contacted individually and have performed grant tasks	Haphazard; Proposal states the group will determine logistics once it is formed	Not very likely at this stage; however, they do have plans to convene RCN meetings eventually

Some grantees do not have a clear picture of what an RCN is or what theirs should look like. For example, the interview asked the question “What does the RCN mean to you in the context of your grant?” One grantee responded: “we struggle with that daily, let me tell you.” Over the course of Phase I, however, this grantee mentioned that they had an evolution of thought in regard to MOFAS’ vision for grantee RCNs and now understands what their RCN should do to meet that vision.

After six months of funding, only two RCNs have met as a full group. It is not clear whether this reflects grantee misunderstanding of how RCNs should operate or grantees’ tailoring their RCN structure to best suit the needs of the people or entities they are trying to involve in their RCNs (e.g. they know that they will never be able to get most or all members in the same room at the same time).

In conclusion, each grantee RCN has a unique structure, is in a different stage of development and operates in a different manner, and few are coming together as a full group.

Extent to which Grantee RCNs are Fulfilling Important Aspects of MOFAS’ Vision for the Community Grants Program

A main purpose of the MOFAS Community Grants program is to help RCNs leverage their resources and build their capacity to collaborate so that they can implement culturally competent, FASD prevention, intervention, and support activities and services in a more coordinated and

comprehensive fashion. The end goal is a sustainable network of FASD services in each funded region that will continue beyond the window of MOFAS Community Grant funding.

Understanding the extent to which grantees' visions for their RCNs match with MOFAS's vision is important for several reasons. The strategy of utilizing an RCN to create sustainable change is a new direction for MOFAS, the grantees and FASD service providers in Minnesota. The RCN is a difficult concept to implement and grantees are often at a disadvantage because they did not contribute to the drafting of their agency's proposal. To some extent, the ways in which RCNs will collaborate are as yet unknown. In fact, the Request for Applications for the community grants program does not prescribe what collaboration should look like, except to state that the agencies in the RCN should be "partnering."

PDA considered information from the proposal, the quarterly reports, and the first round of interviews to draw some conclusions about the match in vision for the RCNs. MOFAS has the opportunity to consider the qualities of each RCN and the extent to which each collaborative style fulfills the vision of what an RCN should be. MOFAS can then provide technical assistance and redirection as needed as the RCNs continue to develop.

The interviews reveal differences in collaborative styles and functioning even at this early stage of development. The major themes that emerged from the interviews are reported below.

Collaboration between RCN members is limited

Overall, most collaboration between RCN members has occurred within a small sub-group of members, but, for the most part, has not occurred amongst the larger membership of each grantee RCN. For example, to date, most grant work has been conducted by project coordinators (grant staff) in collaboration with small groups of RCN members (workgroups or steering committees). And, if a larger number of RCN members have been engaged in the work of the grant (e.g. at RCN meetings), it is typically to act as advisors, oversee or plan grant activities, or, are given "work orders" that involve them conducting work in isolation from most other RCN members (e.g. the "silo" approach). However, several grantees appear to be making substantial progress toward their Phase I goals and the goals of the initiative using this "silo" approach.

As mentioned above, the Community Grants RFA gives only a general guideline as to how the RCNs should collaborate in order to achieve the goals of the initiative. From these guidelines we cannot make a hard and fast judgment as to whether the current levels of collaboration seen in the RCNs are sufficient. However, the funding philosophy document suggests that a greater degree of collaboration may be necessary to create sustainable change, although it purposefully does not mandate one specific style of collaboration.

Now that the grants have been funded and more is known about the strengths and needs of each region, MOFAS should further solidify its vision for how the RCNs should collaborate and communicate that vision to the grantees. While it is still early in the grant-funding period, and some grantees have not yet developed a clear plan for how they will engage RCN members, the lack of collaborative work amongst RCN members may indicate a need for additional grantee training about MOFAS' vision for collaboration.

Grantees have differing perceptions about how RCN members should contribute

While some grantees have developed clearly articulated roles for their RCN members, most have not or they have assigned members roles that will not necessarily lead them toward creating sustainable change within their organizations or systems. This may be just a reflection of the fact that it is early in the grant-funding period and RCN member roles may evolve as programs mature or it may be an indication that this area needs to be addressed or emphasized with grantees.

Grantees are using an integrated approach to cover the full range of FASD priorities: prevention, identification and diagnosis, intervention and support

The membership of the RCNs and the activities completed so far indicate that for the most part grantees are using a comprehensive and integrated approach to addressing FASD within their region. Recruitment of RCN members spans professions and agencies that can contribute to the full range of FASD services, including prevention, identification and diagnosis, intervention and support services. For most grantees, professional education and public awareness activities also span the full range of FASD topics.

Plans for sustainability have not yet been fully delineated

At this time, most grantee sustainability plans address one or a few aspects of the continuum of FASD prevention, identification, diagnosis and support services. While a few grantees understand how sustainability can be achieved (at least in a few sectors), most grantees appear to have a vague understanding of how they will produce changes that will be sustainable over time (e.g., they plan to connect RCN members with one another, or they plan to develop resources). As projects mature, this piece may become clearer; however, since the production of sustainable change is paramount to this grant initiative, it may be worthwhile to re-engage grantees in discussions regarding sustainability and give them examples of the types of change that will be sustainable over time.

Education of professionals around FASD is a primary strategy for creating change

Many grantees articulated that by educating professionals around FASD these professionals will, in turn, be transformed into FASD advocates—they will become enlightened and go back to their organizations and implement systemic changes. To paraphrase one grantee comment, *once professionals are educated it will be as if they have been given a road map; they will know their agency's role and responsibility in addressing FASD and they will do that work*. One additional step grantees should consider is how they can additionally provide these professionals with concrete directions as to how they can create change within their organizations and how they can create systems change to support institutions and individuals to address FASD; however, this is still not a guarantee that the trained professionals will institute any changes. Professionals may need to be provided with additional incentives (i.e. money, other resources—something that would make it worth their investment of time and energy).

Grantees need to flesh out or more clearly articulate their theory of change

Grantees may need to take a step back and clearly articulate their theories for how systematic changes will occur as a result of their efforts. This would help many grantees and MOFAS to see changes (flaws or adjustments) that need to be made to the logic. It would also be a way to

illuminate strategies that have been successful for grantees, which could then be disseminated to all grantees. As the grants move into the second and third years of funding, they should also move beyond working to create change in individual professionals and agencies to consider systems change activities.

Emerging needs have created shifts in grantee focus

Some grantees have diverged from their original RCN vision. For the most part, however, these divergences do not indicate a failure to implement the proposal as planned, but rather a response to emerging needs that have been identified through their RCN / grant work so far. They are addressing these emerging needs and barriers because they relate directly to what they would like to ultimately accomplish with their grant, even though they were not originally identified as objectives or activities in their proposals. For example, one grant had proposed that RCN members would conduct educational sessions for professionals outside of the network. Instead, the grant learned through RCN recruitment efforts that potential RCN members themselves did not have the readiness to undertake this work. The grant needed to take a step back and educate professionals in order to prepare them to participate in the RCN. Other grants have changed their membership or modified their planned RCN structures from what was originally proposed once they came to a better understanding of “the lay of the land” within their region. In most cases, the RCNs remain true to their intended vision, even with such changes, and in some cases RCNs have actually been improved (i.e. more in line with MOFAS’ vision and / or are more productive).

In conclusion, grantees RCNs are fulfilling some aspects of MOFAS’ vision and appear to be falling short on others. In some instances it is not always clear whether grantee RCNs are fulfilling a particular aspect of MOFAS’ vision, as many aspects of the vision are not entirely clear and leave room for interpretation. For example, while the collaboration within the RCNs is limited, most grantees are making substantial progress toward achieving their Phase I goals despite a somewhat limited degree of collaboration. It is unclear to what extent this collaborative style matches what was envisioned by MOFAS, since the language describing collaboration is somewhat vague. In addition, grantees are using professional education as their primary strategy for producing change, but there are gaps in the chain of logic between providing training and producing a sustainable network of FASD services. Finally, grantees’ understanding of what an effective RCN should look like and of how to build such a network continues to evolve and shift. Grantees’ visions for their RCNs appear to be moving toward a closer match with MOFAS’s vision but could benefit from discussions with MOFAS to clarify various aspects of MOFAS’ funding vision.

DISCUSSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, the status of RCN development is appropriate for grants that are midway through their first year. The challenges and gaps identified in this report are not of major concern at this point in time. They do, however, highlight important areas for focus, training, and oversight in Year 2.

As Year 2 and future year workplans are developed, MOFAS and grantees should give continued thought to the evolution of their activities as their programs mature, and to how grantee activities

can be directed to best meet MOFAS's vision. While individual grants vary in focus, most Year 1 capacity building activities include raising awareness and providing one-shot basic education about FASD. In subsequent grant years, capacity building may more appropriately include providing *ongoing* training as well as professional support, building long-term relationships between agencies, and guiding agencies to make permanent changes in protocols, policies, and resource allocation to sustain efforts over the long term. Giving professionals tools and instructions as to how to implement changes within their organizations and to produce systems change will increase the likelihood that changes will be instituted; however, some professionals / agencies may need more incentive to make changes.

Grants that operate in "silos" (where the grant staff go out to individual agencies to carry out the work of the grant but do not connect agencies with one another) run the risk of their RCNs falling apart after MOFAS funding ends. Such grants (and MOFAS) should consider whether the change they produce is likely to continue or be sustained without their continued guidance. If not, they need to work more on developing fuller collaborative relationships within the region. One first step grantees could take to improve collaboration would be to more clearly define and communicate RCN member roles. Now would also be a good time for MOFAS to provide training on the topics of collaboration and sustainability, possibly by inviting more experienced or successful grantee organizations to share lessons learned.

In the coming months it would be helpful for MOFAS to talk directly with grantees about what RCNs are and how they would like to see RCN members collaborate, as this is an essential piece of the grant initiative. We also recommend that MOFAS draft a memo for grantees with a clear explanation of expectations for collaboration within the RCNs.

Over the first six months of the funding period, grantees have progressed in their understanding of what their RCNs should look like, who should be on board and what kind of work they intend to accomplish. Additional changes or evolutions of thought regarding grant activities and meeting MOFAS' vision will likely occur as programs continue to mature; however, it is likely that MOFAS will need to continue providing reminders of the MOFAS grant vision until it is clearly understood by all grantees. MOFAS can also make this determination of "vision match" on an individual grant basis, and work with grantees as necessary to get and keep them on track.