

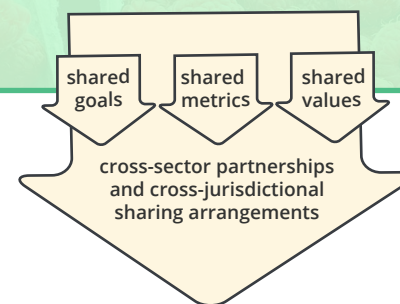
Improving Community Health Through Cross-Sector Partnerships:

Increasing Access to Physical Activity & Healthy Food in Eastern Oregon



Cross-sector partners worked together to:

- ▶ Create a broad-based coalition
- ▶ Develop a Community Needs & Readiness Assessment
- ▶ Initiate action on sustainable community changes
- ▶ Raise funds to provide “kick start” grants for community projects



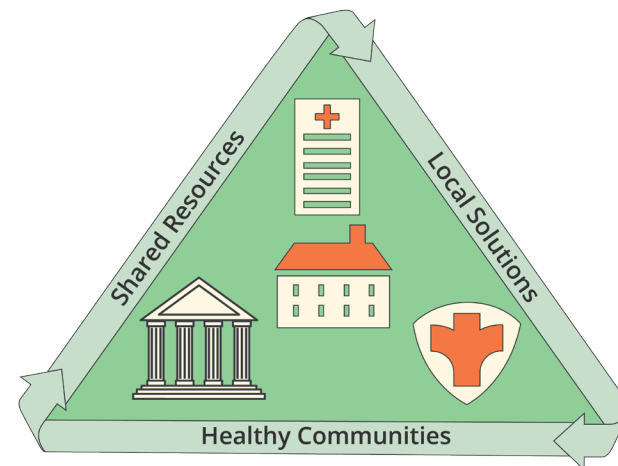
Background

Health starts—long before illness—in our homes, schools, neighborhoods, and jobs. Public health agencies in Oregon are collaborating with community partners to make communities healthier and ensure that people have access to critical prevention services. Community partnership development is a foundational capability for state and local public health agencies in Oregon and for many decades, local public health agencies throughout Oregon have demonstrated skill and dedication in forming cross-sector relationships with private, public, and governmental organizations that share many of the same goals. **The purpose**

of this case study is to increase understanding of the effective formation and use of cross-sector partnerships to improve community health.

The Project: Access to Physical Activity & Healthy Food

Plan4Health is a national program sponsored by the American Planning Association (APA) and the American Public Health Association (APHA). Competitive funding is provided to communities that have a desire and capacity to form sustainable, cross-sector partnerships to improve access to healthy food or increase opportunities for active living.



For more information: <http://ucoplan4health.wixsite.com/ucoplan4health>

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Umatilla County applied for and received a capacity-building grant to participate in the Plan4Health program in 2015. Their efforts were focused on assessing local needs to support future decision-making.

Project Goals

Members of the grant team wanted to work together to figure out ways that they could better incorporate land use planning methods to improve health outcomes for community members. The information gathered will help the Plan4Health Coalition direct resources towards projects that are achievable, based on characteristics of the community.

The Partnership

Three organizations partnered to apply for funding: the Umatilla County Public Health Department, the Umatilla County Department of Land Use Planning, and the American Planning Association, Oregon Chapter. Once funding was awarded, this core group formed a coalition that included the Confederated Indian Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation, the Umatilla County Board of Commissioners, representation from the cities of Hermiston, Pendleton, and

Weston, Good Shepherd and St Anthony hospitals, and the local school district.

Grant funds were used to pay a project coordinator at the Umatilla County Public Health Department who administered core functions of the project such as conducting community outreach, overseeing an assessment contract, and developing project materials. The coalition leveraged additional resources to support the project. Umatilla County provided financial resources for components of the project that were not funded through the grant, and both the public health and land use planning departments contributed staff resources to the project. Also, the Confederated Indian Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation supported the project through providing staff time and subject matter expertise from their land use planner. Other community partners later joined the coalition, including hospitals, businesses, ranchers and farmers.

Before this project, the public health department and the land use planning department had not undertaken joint projects, so this opportunity offered a chance to build and strengthen partnerships between the two sectors. This partner-

ship also afforded an opportunity to help other stakeholders better understand the connection between land use planning and improving health.

The Umatilla Plan4Health Coalition chose to focus their efforts on assessing local needs to support informed decision-making on what types of projects to pursue in the future.

“Oftentimes—just speaking from a city perspective—it's really easy to get self-involved and miss seeing those opportunities to collaborate. There's a big scarcity mindset because funding is always limited, but the realization that when we all work together we can all achieve better outcomes, really needs to be emphasized going forward. I see it more and more frequently, that there is so much more to be gained through collaboration.”

—Government Partner

Umatilla Plan4Health Convening Partners



Accomplishments

Before this project, the connection between the physical environment and the health of the community, while understood by a select few, was not well established among the policy makers and community groups. This partnership allowed for policy maker and community engagement on this issue and increased awareness and capacity for future work. Having professionals from both sectors was key in explaining health-related problems and solutions related to the built environment.

Over the course of the project, the partners completed a [Community Needs and Readiness Assessment](#) primarily focused on strategies related to physical activity and diet. The assessment identified six key issues that impact population health in Umatilla County. The coalition then identified “opportunity areas” to address these key issues.

Key Issues

1. Infrastructure
2. Physical Access
3. Economic Circumstances & Affordability
4. Safety & Comfort
5. Information Availability & Communication
6. Underlying Conditions & Systems

Opportunity Areas

1. Policy Changes
2. Education
3. Infrastructure & Changes to the Physical Environment
4. Information Dissemination – Showcasing & Publicizing Existing Features and Resources

5. Food Access & Connections to Local Agriculture
6. Changing Organizations’ Mindset – Collaboration for Health

The coalition raised funds to provide small grants to community groups to “kick start” nutrition and physical activity projects. Four projects were funded, including construction of a chicken coop (making USDA-qualified egg production possible at a school) and installing a walking/jogging path at another school. These small grants got resources into smaller communities. And, importantly, these projects spurred more local partnerships and successes.

“When they kicked off the project it got a resolution from the county commissioners and one of them did ask, ‘What does this really have to do with health?’ By the end, they said ‘Well, what are you doing about this? What are you doing about that?’ They were totally on board.”

—Community-based Organization Partner

“So the coalition actually did some really neat projects. A school applied for some funding to construct a chicken coop. They’re working with the Oregon Department of Education to develop a USDA approved egg production program. So they’re having the students construct the coop that the Future Farmers of America Club will be managing. They’ll be increasing the egg usage in the school, using them in school lunches and hopefully selling them to the community as well.”

—Government Partner

Barriers + Success Factors

The grant partners experienced difficulty engaging city planners throughout the region. They had hoped to have more city planners participate in the coalition.

In retrospect some coalition members felt they had missed an opportunity to connect more with the Oregon Health Authority, Public Health Division; they saw the Public Health Division as a valuable resource but lacked time to build the partnership.

Starting something new that was “very different from anything else we do” was seen as both a challenge and a success because the partners found that, in general, organizations in the coalition were excited to do something new.

The project laid the foundation for future collaborative work. Before this project, public health would not usually be at the table with land use planning. Now, public health participates in the regional trails project with county and tribal planning departments. Similarly, Umatilla County’s Land Use Planning Director now participates in the Community Health Improvement Plan.

The grant and the partnership allowed for a true focus on obesity prevention. As one coalition member noted, “In terms of an understanding of general obesity rates, food deserts, real lack of infrastructure for alternative transportation modes, etc., organizations need to be clear on the picture they’re working on. By having two main figures involved, the county health and the county planning, that kept that focus very clear.”

Lessons Learned

Starting coalitions can be difficult; people are wary of more meetings, making recruitment challenging, and developing consensus on mission and focus is often arduous work. However, moving through this phase is necessary and, in this instance, pays in dividends. The co-conveners of the coalition stayed the course but were flexible and strategic in developing and supporting the coalition.

In addition to researching and developing a focused, actionable assessment, the partnership wanted to transform and expand the way that planners and public health professionals viewed their own professions and purview to improve health and livability. These two objectives were woven together through joint leadership from the public health and planning sectors.

Moving Forward

The Plan4Health grant was for capacity building and has been expended. Without funding, partners understand that the project will continue, but need to adapt to moving at a slower pace. The Plan4Health Community Needs and Readiness Assessment outlines a structure for implementation that can be operationalized as resources are available.

The partnership is currently working on incorporating findings and recommendations from the Plan4Health Community Needs and Readiness Assessment into the Umatilla County Community Health Improvement Plan. This will provide one pathway for amplifying the work of the partnership and addressing some of the priorities outlined by the coalition.

“There’s a lot of synergy, that can come from these inter-governmental, inter-agency collaborations. A lot of that comes from just knowing each other, just meeting each other in meetings, and seeing each other. It’s not necessarily like being dictated by the county commissioners or the board of trustees to go talk to somebody about something.”

—Government Partner



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