



Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA)

Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance Use Program (COSSUP)

# Reaching Rural: Advancing Collaborative Solutions

Strengthening Cross-sector Partnerships to Respond to the Impact of Substance Use in Rural Communities

## Initiative Overview and Application

### Introduction

The United States is experiencing a crisis of drug overdose deaths. While no corner of the country has gone untouched by the overdose crisis, it has hit rural America particularly hard. In July 2022, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) noted that drug overdose death rates continue to rise in rural and urban areas. In eight states—California, Connecticut, Maryland, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Vermont, and Virginia—the rate of drug overdose deaths in rural counties was higher than in urban counties.

The [Reaching Rural Initiative](#) is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), Office of Justice Programs (OJP), Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the State Justice Institute (SJI). The Institute for Intergovernmental Research (IIR) is releasing this solicitation on their behalf.

BJA, CDC, and SJI support this initiative as part of an ongoing interagency partnership to strengthen public safety and public health collaboration under BJA's Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance

Use Program (COSSUP). COSSUP provides funding and training and technical assistance (TTA) to state, local, tribal, and territorial partners to support a comprehensive response to illicit substance use and misuse; reduce overdose deaths; promote public safety; and support access to prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and recovery services in the community and justice system.

### About The Opportunity

The one-year planning initiative is designed for rural justice and public safety practitioners; public health and behavioral health practitioners; city, county, and tribal leaders; and community groups. The planning initiative empowers rural practitioners to build deeper networks, particularly across sectors; adopt bold solutions to the persistent challenge of substance use and misuse in rural communities; and reimagine how diverse systems with different missions can engage with one another to more effectively serve justice-involved individuals with substance use or co-occurring disorders. For this solicitation, the term "sector" refers to different disciplines, such as judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, probation officers, child welfare



workers, tribal court officers, public health workers, behavioral health practitioners, etc.

Rural communities vary in their capacity to commit multiple staff members to a year-long planning initiative. The planning initiative provides two pathways for communities to apply to participate. Applicants may apply to participate in the planning phase as an individual practitioner or as a cross-sector team, as outlined below, from the same community or region.

The initial planning initiative is not a grant opportunity. Participants will be reimbursed for their travel expenses when attending sponsored activities, but no additional funding is provided due to being selected for the planning initiative.

At the conclusion of the planning period (the end of calendar year 2024), Reaching Rural fellows will have the opportunity to apply for an implementation grant of up to \$100,000 for up to 15 months to launch a project planned during the Reaching Rural fellowship. This funding will only be available to Reaching Rural fellows who have fully participated in the planning initiative. To be eligible to apply for the funding in the fall of 2024, all applicants will need to demonstrate that they have built a cross-sector partnership that, at a minimum, includes at least one justice or public safety practitioner, at least one public health representative, and at least one behavioral health practitioner that has been meeting since June 2024. Additional details about the funding opportunity will be distributed at the in-person kick-off.

## Eligibility To Apply

All proposed activities supported under this solicitation are designed for rural communities. To determine if your community is defined as “rural,” use the [Rural Health Grants Eligibility Analyzer](#), a tool maintained by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). If you believe your community is rural but not identified as such by the HRSA tool,

please provide documentation that your community has been designated rural by an alternative state or federal agency.

We aspire to recruit a diverse group of rural practitioners with different skills and backgrounds committed to learning from others and exchanging ideas. We encourage anyone interested to apply, regardless of their previous level of experience or exposure to this topic. We aim to engage rural practitioners who do not have prior cross-sector strategic planning experience but are enthusiastic about the opportunity to participate in this effort with other practitioners from their community and practitioners from other rural communities.

Additional eligibility information can be found below.

## Cross-Sector Team Applicant Eligibility Requirements

Communities benefit from a comprehensive and coordinated response to substance use and misuse. Over the course of the planning period, cross-sector teams will have the opportunity to learn from other rural practitioners using evidence-based practices or promising approaches to implement community-based programs that address substance use challenges. Cross-sector teams are expected to use the 12 months to identify local opportunities to align agency-level efforts and commit to advancing your community's response to substance use. Up to 10 teams from rural communities or regions will be selected to participate in this initiative. The lead applicant agency may be a county, city, parish, town government, or tribal entity. Regional applications representing more than one jurisdiction are welcome, but one city, county, or tribe should be identified as the lead applicant.

## Cross-Sector Team Composition

Each planning team must, at a minimum, consist of four people from three different sectors: justice or public safety, public health, and behavioral health.

Applicants are encouraged to include optional team members from additional sectors who bring value to the project. Travel funds will be provided for up to six people per planning team, one person per agency. This opportunity is designed for team members who can commit to the project for the planning initiative and have a working knowledge of how their agency interfaces with individuals with SUDs and the justice system. This may include agency leaders or mid-level staff members. Team members who are not agency leaders must include a letter of support from their agency director to participate.

**Mandatory Team Member 1:** A justice representative (e.g., prosecutor's office, defense organizations/agencies, sheriff's office, police department, community supervision [pretrial or probation], judicial officer).

**Mandatory Team Member 2:** A second justice representative (e.g., prosecutor's office, defense organizations/agencies, sheriff's office, police department, community supervision [pretrial or probation], judicial officer) from a different agency than mandatory team member 1.

**Mandatory Team Member 3:** A public health official

**Mandatory Team Member 4:** A substance use or co-occurring substance use and mental health treatment professional

**Optional Team Member 5:** To be determined by the applicant

**Optional Team Member 6:** To be determined by the applicant

*Applicants will receive priority consideration if one of the team members is a judicial officer such as a judge or court administrator. Additionally, applicants will receive priority consideration if one of the team members is an elected or appointed local government representative or tribal leader.*

Optional team members are encouraged from other agencies listed above (e.g., additional public safety, treatment, government representatives from different agencies, or an elected or appointed local government representative or justice leader) or additional sectors. Additional sectors include, for example, faith-based organizations, transportation agencies, housing agencies, peer recovery support services, child welfare agencies, social services, hospitals, fire departments, harm reduction services, or emergency medical services (EMS).

Under rare circumstances, applications may be considered with an alternative to a mandatory team member if appropriate justification is provided. If the team is assembled with all the mandatory team members except one, please feel free to apply, but the application must include a written explanation of why the mandatory team member is not included.

In limited circumstances, agencies serving on the cross-sector team may be physically located in urban or rural areas, but all activities supported by this program must exclusively target populations residing in rural counties or rural census tracts in urban and suburban communities, and the composition of the cross-sector team must, overall, be representative of rural entities within the applicant region.

## Coordinator Role

The Cross-Sector Team Application must be completed by one of the partner agencies. The application should indicate which mandatory team member will be the local project coordinator. This individual will serve as the primary point of contact for the initiative and will be responsible for scheduling team meetings with the site coaches, ensuring team members attend all required meetings, and serving as the main point of contact for submitting required materials throughout the project.

## Individual Applicant Eligibility Requirements

This opportunity is designed for rural practitioners who work for:

- ◀ A local unit of government (city, town, county, parish).
- ◀ A federally recognized Indian tribal government (determined by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior).
- ◀ A nonprofit agency that works with a local unit of government or federally recognized Indian tribal government to respond to substance use or misuse issues and/or individuals with co-occurring disorders.

Applicants who work for a for-profit company will be considered on a case-by-case basis but will need a letter of support from the local government or tribal entity they work closely within their current role.

Individuals must have the capacity to commit to the project for the year and have a working knowledge of how their agency and/or their current role interfaces with individuals with SUDs and the justice system. This opportunity will primarily benefit agency leaders and mid-level staff members. Individual applicants who are not agency leaders must include a letter of support from their agency director.

## Benefits of Participating in the Reaching Rural Initiative

All attendees, whether they participate as an individual or a team, will:

- ◀ Assess local or regional opportunities for systemic change.
- ◀ Build leadership skills to facilitate cross-sector collaboration.
- ◀ Explore the implementation of evidence-informed strategies in diverse rural settings.

- ◀ Identify opportunities for different sectors (e.g., law enforcement, child welfare, prosecutors, defense attorneys, probation, judges, public health, behavioral health) to effectively align efforts.
- ◀ Prioritize opportunities and strategies and commit to action.
- ◀ Build a roadmap for local implementation.
- ◀ Identify resources to support the implementation of the roadmap.
- ◀ Commit to a project or individualized learning opportunity in month 5 of the project and devote focused time during months 6 through 11 to that effort. This portion of the planning initiative will be developed in collaboration with your assigned site coach.

Participation in the planning initiative includes:

- ◀ Travel and per diem reimbursement to participate in three in-person meetings: an orientation, a field visit to observe the implementation of evidence-informed practices in a rural setting, and a closing session.
- ◀ Monthly mentorship and guidance aimed toward your local needs.
- ◀ Monthly assignments that help you apply core concepts to your local community or region.
- ◀ Access to a diverse network of peers, innovative rural communities (including the Rural Justice Collaborative's Innovation Sites), and technical assistance (TA) providers.
- ◀ Formal recognition for completing the planning initiative.

## Time Commitment Associated With the Reaching Rural Initiative

It is important to review the time commitment associated with participating in this initiative to determine if the planning initiative is the right fit for you. A sample overview of planned activities is

provided below. Please note that the schedule is an example for applicants to assess the time commitment associated with the Reaching Rural initiative and does not represent the final schedule.

Tentative Month	Description of Activity	Estimated Time Commitment
February 2024	Virtual kick-off meeting	1.5-hour meeting
March 2024	Pre-work for the face-to-face meeting and meeting with coaches	2 hours of pre-work offline 1 hour meeting
April 22-26, 2024	In-person meeting	2.5 days of meetings plus travel days
May 2024	Individuals: Virtual meeting with coaches and follow-up work  Teams: On-site strategic planning with coaches	1-hour meeting with coaches 2 hours of follow-up work offline 4 hours of pre-work offline 1-day meeting in community with team members
June 2024	Virtual meeting with coaches and follow-up work	1-hour meeting with coaches 2 hours of follow-up work offline
July/August 2024	Virtual meeting with coaches and follow-up work or in-person site visits	1-hour meeting with coaches and 2 hours of follow-up work offline one month 2.5 days of meetings plus travel days the other month
September 2024	Virtual meeting with coaches and follow-up work	1-hour meeting with coaches 2 hours of follow-up work offline
October 2024	Virtual meeting with coaches and follow-up work	1-hour meeting with coaches 2 hours of follow-up work offline
November 2024	Virtual meeting with coaches and follow-up work	1-hour meeting with coaches 2 hours of follow-up work offline
December 2024	Virtual meeting with coaches and follow-up work	1-hour meeting with coaches 2 hours of follow-up work offline
January 2025	Virtual meeting with coaches and follow-up work	1-hour meeting with coaches 2 hours of follow-up work offline
February 2025	Rehearsal and prep for final presentations	1-hour meeting with coaches 2 hours of follow-up work offline
February 2025	In-person meeting	2.5 days of meetings plus 2 travel days

## Attendance Requirements Associated with the Planning Initiative

Attendance at all in-person and virtual planning sessions is expected. Excused absences are allowed

and should not exceed 10 percent of participation. The in-person orientation session is mandatory as a foundation for the planning initiative. If the applicant does not attend the orientation session, they may not be eligible to remain in the planning initiative.

## Selection Process

We are committed to ensuring a fair and open process for this initiative. Submitting an application will not guarantee selection to participate in this initiative. The review committee will consist of federal sponsor (BJA, CDC, SJI) representatives, select rural practitioners, IIR, and the site coaches. The project partners will review and score applications with the final approval of BJA, CDC, and SJI. All selection decisions are final. BJA, CDC, and SJI will be consulted on all aspects of the project, including site selection.

## How To Apply

All application components must be submitted via online application:

- ◀ Cross-Sector Team application link here: <http://s.iir.com/d5a7RnpQ>
- ◀ Individual application link here: <http://s.iir.com/XbmG95w7>

A PDF copy of the Cross-Sector Team application questions can be accessed at <http://s.iir.com/6hZdeuBH>. A PDF copy of the Individual application questions can be accessed at <http://s.iir.com/TzX9VUQU>. All required application components must be submitted via online application no later than 5:00pm ET on December 15, 2023. Applicants will receive a notice of submission upon completion of the online application.

Final selection decisions will be made by the project partners by December 19, 2023. Questions about your application? Please send an email to [COSSUP@iir.com](mailto:COSSUP@iir.com) and we will respond to your inquiry promptly.

## Application Timelines

**Applicant Webinar:** November 14, 2023, at 1:00pm ET. Please register for the webinar at <http://s.iir.com/Reaching-Rural-Solicitation> and submit questions in advance of the webinar to [COSSUP@iir.com](mailto:COSSUP@iir.com) no later than November 13, 2023. Emails containing questions should include the name, agency, and email address of the submitter.

**Applications due:** December 15, 2023

**Notification of selection:** January 26, 2024

**Project kick-off:** February 22, 2024

### Applicant Checklist

\_\_\_\_\_ Online application

\_\_\_\_\_ Letters of commitment

\_\_\_\_\_ Support letter from the applicant's agency director, if applicable

Visit the Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance Use Program (COSSUP) Resource Center at [www.cossup.org](http://www.cossup.org).

## About BJA

The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) provides leadership and services in grant administration and criminal justice policy development to support local, state, and tribal justice strategies to achieve safer communities. To learn more about BJA, visit <https://bja.ojp.gov> and follow us on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/DOJBJA](https://www.facebook.com/DOJBJA)) and X/Twitter (@DOJBJA). BJA is part of the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs.

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