



Case Study: Virginia’s SOR Grant Evaluation & Technical Assistance

In 2019, Virginia’s Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) contracted OMNI Institute as its State Opioid Response (SOR) grant research and evaluation partner. OMNI established comprehensive capacity building and evaluation planning across the areas of prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and recovery and designed the SOR evaluation to track progress and outcomes. Data from the evaluation has helped pinpoint successes and challenges and has informed DBHDS’ strategy moving forward. Through this partnership, OMNI and DBHDS have worked together to create a model for what SOR grant funding can achieve.

Setting the Vision for Impact

OMNI facilitated initial conversations with DBHDS to articulate their vision of what they hoped to achieve with SOR funds. OMNI used this information to build a comprehensive evaluation that would help DBHDS to quantify SOR impact, above and beyond federal reporting requirements. As a result of clearly articulating these goals, the evaluation has been able to demonstrate integration across the continuum of care, highlight Virginia’s peer recovery work to position them as a national expert, and identify gaps where DBHDS can continue to grow to address emerging opioid and stimulant use disorder needs.

Leveraging Data Expertise

With the vision in mind, OMNI translated DBHDS’ desire for impact into a Strategic Evaluation Plan that detailed how each component of the vision would be measured and mapped out the data collection processes. Starting with the end in mind allowed us to develop several

“The reason we invest in OMNI’s evaluation and capacity building is because it’s extremely valuable to see what’s working, what’s not working, and to look quarter-by-quarter at the results of our efforts. It helps us to be much better stewards of the funding that we’re working with.”

— Angela Weight, SOR Recovery Services Coordinator, Virginia DBHDS

evaluation tools that go beyond SOR grant requirements. These tools are used both for grant monitoring so DBHDS can make sure things are on track along the way and for measuring outcomes of grant-funded work. More than a dozen data sources are included in the evaluation plan and span SOR-funded strategies, including: coalition development efforts, community awareness media campaigns, behavioral health equity initiatives, Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT), Naloxone training and distribution, jail-based treatment and recovery services, community recovery support services, peer recovery workforce development, and collegiate recovery programs. In addition, OMNI is closely tracking state epidemiological data for opioid-related outcomes such as overdoses and Naloxone administration.

Building a Culture of Data

Collecting data at this scale takes time and effort and relies on buy-in from everyone involved in the SOR grant.

It was necessary to create a new culture around data, getting sub-recipients to understand the importance of data collection and incorporate new habits into their work. OMNI's Technical Assistance (TA) team joined the project to train, guide, and answer sub-recipients' questions—large and small—throughout the evaluation of prevention, harm reduction, treatment and recovery services. OMNI provides trainings on how to navigate data collection and has a host of GPRA-related resources including FAQs, tip sheets, and reminders. Sub-recipients submit their GPRA data to our platform and we submit it to SPARS to meet grant requirements. Because we manage the GPRA data, we are able to oversee data quality and work with sub-recipients to address challenges with GPRA collection. In addition we can provide weekly, bi-weekly, and monthly reminders to sub-recipients to keep them on schedule with the required 6-month follow-up surveys. DBHDS' intake and follow-up rates have consistently been above the grant average across the four years of the SOR Grant. OMNI's TA team builds trust with and connection to the people they support. This trust and connection allows us to evolve and improve our data collection processes, and supports overall program success.

Going Beyond Requirements

SOR funding can be a powerful opportunity to transform the lives of those living with a stimulant or opioid use disorder. OMNI and DBHDS have shown that so much more can be accomplished with the funding than the minimum requirements. In addition to the data sources and reporting required by SAMHSA, DBHDS and OMNI dig deep into data across multiple sources, and OMNI regularly synthesizes these data to find key insights and share those insights via reports, one-pagers, tracking sheets, and presentations that inform and help to guide DBHDS as they manage the grant and determine next steps for addressing Virginians' needs. These insights also support SOR grant sub-recipients in improving service delivery and understanding the value in evaluation activities. The information is also extremely valuable for DBHDS to continue strategic planning for future rounds of SOR funding and other initiatives across the agency.



True Thought Partnership

OMNI takes a role of active partnership with our clients—we pair methods and content expertise to be a thought-partner, rather than merely collecting data to meet grant requirements.

Our SOR team consists of experts including former behavioral health providers who bring their real-world expertise and advise our clients on best practices. We love working with clients to support their goals in bringing innovative approaches to life and sharing the successes of their work. With OMNI as a partner, you'll be amazed at what can be accomplished with your SOR evaluation!



Connecting States in a Learning Community

The opioid epidemic is a crisis on a national scale, and knowledge-sharing is extremely important. OMNI and DBHDS host educational roundtables that bring together SOR administrators from across the nation to discuss and share strategies and best practices, and to form connections for future collaboration. For an invitation to the next roundtable, email sor@omni.org.

Sample Deliverables

■ SOR Annual Report 2020-2021

The 2020-2021 SOR Annual Report is organized by the four core areas of the continuum of care which DBHDS is funding: community-based prevention, harm reduction, treatment services, and peer support services.

omni.org/va-sor-annual-report-2020-2021

■ SOR Quarterly Report

The quarterly progress reports that OMNI produces for DBHDS track a variety of grant activities: community awareness and education, peer support services, Naloxone distribution and training, and more. omni.org/va-sor-quarterly-report

■ Peer Recovery Support Implementation Guide: Collegiate Settings

These guides offer recommendations to address common challenges of peer implementation in settings where peer work is growing. OMNI has also produced Peer Recovery Support Implementation Guides for Hospitals and Emergency Departments, and Justice Settings.

omni.org/peer-implementation-guide-collegiate