**Case Study: Identifying Regional Ecosystem Goals and Strategies**

Phase 2 of the Recovery-to-Work Ecosystem Builders Guide focuses on solidifying and deepening partnerships between organizations that have started working together to connect people in recovery to job and career opportunities. Once a region has a better understanding of its strengths and opportunities, the organizations leading the work can develop shared, cross-organizational goals and a plan for achieving them.

Between 2020 and 2022, DDAA led two separate cohorts of Appalachian regions through a “Cohort Learning Academy” process designed to strengthen their own regional recovery-to-work ecosystems. The Cohort Learning Academy model is designed to both help regions to develop lasting partnerships across a variety of organizations and to share knowledge between regions about best practices and lessons learned in recovery-to-work ecosystem development. The Learning Academy led regions through a process of first identifying shared goals across organizations and second, developing strategies to achieve those goals. The examples below showcase first, the goals developed by the four regions that participated in the 2021-2022 cohort and second, how one region in the 2020-2021 cohort translated goals into strategies. Once a region has developed goals and strategies, it can use the [regional action plan template](https://crecstorage.blob.core.windows.net/ddaa/sites/6/2022/11/RTW-Action-Plan-Template.xlsx) to identify action steps, champion organizations and key partners, and the timeline for each strategy. This helps regions move from big ideas to shared commitment to tangible action steps.

**Recovery to Work Ecosystem Goals: Examples from Four Regions**

Four regions participated in the 2021-2022 Recovery to Work Cohort Learning Academy, including:

***First Tennessee Development District***

The First Tennessee Development District (FTDD) is based in Johnson City, Tennessee serving eight counties and twenty municipalities. As part of the Cohort Learning Academy, the FTDD team set three goals:

* Build a network that provides seamless transition to stable reintegration into society;
* Grow the employer network; and,
* Create a sustainable network of local allies.

***Ohio Mid-Eastern Governments Association***

The Ohio Mid-Eastern Governments Association (OMEGA) spans a ten-county area of Eastern Ohio where most counties are served by single-county recovery organizations and active, but often disconnected, regional efforts to assist those recovery from substance use disorder. When OMEGA joined the Learning Academy, the region already had an existing continuum of care model in place for the homeless population and growing activity in the recovery-to-work space, with two separate INSPIRE grants and a POWER grant in place. However, the approach was not coordinated or systemic. Through the Learning Academy, OMEGA developed and began to pursue the following goals:

* Foster a community of collaboration across the recovery to work ecosystem;
* Increase the number of employers in the region that hire, support, and retain people in recovery; and,
* Improve access to support services available to those in recovery from substance use disorder throughout the region.

***Piedmont Triad Regional Council***

The Northwest North Carolina Opioid/Substance Use Collaborative is composed of organizations and agencies operating across several counties from the High Country to the Piedmont in North Carolina, including the Piedmont Triad Regional Council. The group was formed with a shared vision to create a sustained impact to increase access and opportunities across the region for the substance abuse disorder (SUD) population. Through the Cohort Learning Academy, the Collaborative developed a regional action plan focused on three goals and key strategies associated with each:

* Assess readiness of key stakeholders and systems and barriers in the region;
* Raise the visibility of the SU crisis in our communities, as well as the visibility of the response to this crisis; and,
* Support employers as Recovery to Work Partners.

***Southeast Tennessee Development District***

The Southeast Tennessee Development District represents a region comprised of 10 counties in Southeast Tennessee including Bledsoe, Bradley, Grundy, Hamilton, Marion, McMinn, Meigs, Polk, Rhea, and Sequatchie. The group began with a mandate from the LDD’s board to identify opportunities to place recovering citizens into gainful and productive employment. The group identified several goals for their community including:

* Enhance regional coordination and develop stronger integration and delivery of programs and services;
* Build a robust continuum of care beyond treatment; and,
* Engage employers to serve as regional champions for hiring workers in recovery.

**Recovery to Work Ecosystem Strategies: How One Region Turned Goals into Strategies**

The Upper Cumberland Development District (UCDD) is composed of 14 predominately rural counties. UCDD started the Recovery-to-Work Cohort Learning Academy in early 2020 with a strong foundation of local partners and a promising model for centralizing the data, reporting, and communications for all treatment and recovery services within the region. The early work of the Consortium led to UCDD developing a “Hub-and-Spoke” system that connects the initial treatment request for an individual with substance use disorder to a treatment center and a peer caseworker who tracks, facilitates, and evaluates the progress of the individual toward sustained recovery. Connecting individuals in recovery to employment was a significant challenge in the Upper Cumberland region and was identified as a top priority for UCDD’s participation in the Learning Academy from the start. Other priorities for the region on the project’s outset were improving access to affordable housing and creating a framework for program sustainability. Here are the goals and strategies UCDD developed:

***Goal 1:* *Guide individuals through a complex range of services available to navigate the pathway to sustained recovery.***

Strategies identified to achieve regional goal:

* Expand and implement a Hub-and-Spoke model that centralizes data, reporting, and communication of all treatment and recovery services within the region.
* Provide permanent supportive housing and rapid rehousing for individuals in need.
* Improve transportation services.
* Work with judicial and court system on early intervention and providing treatment and reentry options.

***Goal 2:* *Connect individuals in recovery to employment​.***

Strategies identified to achieve regional goal:

* Develop a system of identification and recruitment of recovery-friendly employers.
* Create a system for interface between employer and treatment/recovery services, including a business liaison staff person to interface with employer community.
* Create outreach and training programs for both the individual and for management and co-workers.

***Goal 3: Create flow of funding model that significantly moves Substance Abuse Solutions department towards being self-sustaining.***

Strategies identified to achieve regional goal:

* Develop a value based payment system to interface between insurance / primary care providers and employers​.
* Develop a partnership with healthcare providers and local practitioners.

**Key Takeaways and Lessons Learned**

* Each region’s goals and strategies were a starting point. The strategies changed and were refined as organizations continued to work together, test ideas, and try new approaches.
* Each region included short-term and long-term goals and strategies. Sustainability goals will take longer to achieve, but they are still important to identify at the outset. Regions balanced longer-term goals and strategies with “quick wins” that helped build momentum towards the longer-term goals and strategies.