



## **PARTNERS FOR RURAL WASHINGTON 2022 ANNUAL REPORT**

The past year was a very productive one for Partners for Rural Washington. Not only did we complete one of our long-term projects, but we also accomplished a substantial number of additional activities that supported the people and towns in our ten county service area in Eastern Washington. Most significantly, in September we completed the rehabilitation of the Garfield Health Clinic in cooperation with the Whitman Hospital and Medical Clinics and the Communities of Concern. The clinic recently expanded the number of days it is open each week to three to serve people both in person and via telehealth services in the future.

Also in February, the PRWA board re-elected board members Lael Duncan, Craig Muska and Kim Herman and elected Micki Harnois to the board. The board voted to expand the PRWA service area to include ten counties north and south of Spokane on the recommendation of Jody Opheim, PRWA's Director of Development.

Starting in March, PRWA responded to a request from The Ballmer Group, our first private sector donor, to outline the need for broadband expansion in our ten county service area. This involved working with Petrichor, the port sponsored broadband provider, to identify the unserved communities that need to have broadband extended to them. This resulted in an application for \$500,000 to work on applications for money to expand broadband over a four year period in our service area. We are hopeful The Ballmer Group will respond positively to our request in 2023.

In May, Jody Opheim assisted the city of Harrington to submit a grant application to the Innovia Foundation in Spokane, for a grant to complete their Town Square upgrade project, which resulted in a \$6,200 grant for that project. In another effort, Jody helped the Garfield Farmington Health District get \$85,000 of federal ARPA money via Whitman County for the LaDow Court nursing home in Garfield, to help them train and retain staff and provide COVID tests and PPE equipment through 2024. Jody is also responding to a request from the mayor of Garfield to help the city find the resources to build a new fire station and upgrade their community center.

Also in May, PRWA was approved for a \$20,000 grant from the Innovia Foundation to support our general operations in Eastern Washington for twelve months. Innovia also provides payroll services to PRWA for Jody Opheim's work and the foundation and PRWA are looking at other ways of cooperating in our overlapping service areas.

Finally in May, President Kim Herman and Jody Opheim met via Zoom with the newly appointed USDA State Director, Helen Price Johnson, to tell her about PRWA's work in rural Washington and to ask for her assistance with any opportunities to cooperate with USDA in the future.

Moving to June, PRWA received \$5,000 to support our operations from Banner Bank, another of our early private funders, and we anticipate the opportunity to apply for additional Banner Bank funds in the future.

In July, President Kim Herman met with the Broadband Action Team (BAT) from Okanogan County, at the request of board member, Lael Duncan, to discuss their efforts to expand broadband to unserved areas in their county, which is the largest in the state but has the fewest people per square mile of any county in Washington. Later in the fall, Jody Opheim followed-up with Okanogan County BAT members to connect them with Petrichor and discuss how Petrichor and PRWA can assist them with their broadband expansion efforts. Jody also connected them with Tracey Blackburn, NTIA program officer for Washington state which resulted in an in-person meeting between the BAT and Tracey to discuss the challenges the county has faced in expanding broadband service.

In October this year, Jody helped the Whitman County Rural Library District write a grant for a Digital Navigator Program through the State Broadband Office (SBO). This resulted in a grant of \$500,000 to significantly increase the number of people in Whitman county who are comfortable performing common tasks on computing devices through the provision of 20 one-on-one training sessions per-month per-library; the 'gifting' of laptops to 19 income-qualified families in each community; adding 25 trained 'Digital Navigators' in the county to continue to help residents after the grant period ends; and, to increase the number of households signed up for the Affordable Connectivity Program by approximately 75% over the grant period. The program is expected to benefit a total of 390 households. It also allows all the branch libraries to be open extra hours each week during the duration of the grant, which is a tremendous benefit for these rural communities as many of the smaller libraries are only open 6-10 hours a week.

In addition to these successes, Jody has been providing the following assistance:

- Providing technical assistance to the city of Washtucna and the Whitman County BAT.
- Helping prepare an application to the State Broadband Office (SBO) for broadband expansion in Stevens County.
- Working with the Colfax community to secure funds for a new forty seat daycare center; a proposal to the Port of Whitman County for \$250,000 to use as matching funds for an application to a regional foundation; and, helping with the effort to secure a fundraising consultant to raise additional funds needed from community members and businesses.
- Working with volunteers in the town of Garfield to help establish a nonprofit community association so the group can host town events (especially May Day and Harvest Festival which bring out-of-town guests and vendors), apply for grants, and take on community improvement projects.
- Helping the town of Malden on the administration of their CDBG grants and an application to EPA for their large on-site sewer system (LOSS), which is the next step after their multimillion-dollar state appropriation request, which Jody assisted with, was approved. Jody has submitted a second appropriations request that will complete the funding for the LOSS system, if approved.
- PRWA has been talking with WSU Extension to provide subcontracted services related to the State Broadband Office's preparation of a 5 year broadband plan and establishment of BATs in each county as these are requirements to receive federal BEAD funding for future broadband infrastructure projects. We expect to have an agreement in place with WSU Extension for this work by the end of January, with work taking place from January to June.

Finally, in some other efforts, PRWA submitted a letter in August to support an application from the nonprofit organization Rural Development Initiatives (RDI), for a successful Rural Placemaking Innovation Challenge Grant from USDA for the town of Othello (PRWA will be assisting with this work over the next two years as part of this grant); and received notice that a previously submitted grant application to Group Health Organization was not successful. In October, our Vice President, Lael Duncan, attended the annual meeting of Partners for Rural America, the national organization for Rural Development Councils, and participated in their discussions as PRWA's representative. Also in October, President Kim Herman attended the Innovia Foundation Emeriti and Donor Reception in Spokane.

Overall, it was a very successful year for Partners for Rural Washington, with several major achievements and successfully laying the groundwork for additional community achievements for the small rural communities in our ten county service area.

Respectfully submitted,

*Kim Herman*

Kim Herman, President, PRWA