

JOHS Wage Study Recommendations – Fall 2023 Implementation Update

October 31, 2023 Provider Conference

Notes:

Facilitators: Claudia Sharygin

Moderators: Vienna Roberts and Alyssa Plesser

Prompting questions for the session:

- What are your thoughts about the study?
 - Was there anything in that study that was surprising to you or unexpected?
 - If you participated in the study:
 - Was the data tool that we provided helpful to you?
 - If so, how do you plan to use the information?
 - If not - how could we have improved on the tool?
 - Did you receive additional funding in FY23 to increase compensation for front-line staff? Was this support helpful? Why or why not?
 - What kinds of support would be most helpful to your agency in improving workforce recruitment, retention, and equity outcomes?
-

While the wage study information is helpful, the time between when the data was gathered and when the study was published was long and by the time the report was completed and sent out, the data was old. The wage situation is changing rapidly. As we go forward together looking at how the \$10 mil is allocated and deployed, we will want to be mindful about collecting real time data.

What kind of support: It would be really helpful to have a conversation about why we need wages to increase for the work we are doing, how, and at what dollar amount we want to pay wages for our workforce and how we continue to have wage equity so we are not looking at one stream of funding increasing and that staff who are not funded with that stream not getting increases. How do we make increases consistent and competitive?

[Provider Agency] got some additional funding, 2-3 days before the end of the fiscal year and it was very challenging to apply those dollars and get those dollars out to staff. Accounting and managing the tracking of dollars and how they show up in the audit is critical for all of us- being aware and communicating clearly of the financial impact side of how we get the money. Love money but getting it so close to the end of the fiscal year was really challenging. Be aware of the impact on CBOs and their finances.

- Was that the 8% contract increase specifically or was it a different pot of money?

- It was the leftover fiscal year end FY 23 SHS wage allocation that was part of the unspent funds.
- Again hard to navigate when the multiple funds that JOHS is managing should come to the CBOs in a uniform stream

Agreement with the above comments. Timing was challenging and by the time we got the data it was stale for the organization and across the system because many had made compensation adjustments in between.

What would help going forward:

- Understand how future allocations will be sized in ways to allow us to create wage equity between providers - staff talk to each other and other staff at other organizations. e.g. staff tell us we pay less than other shelter providers. Data comparing providers who are doing similar work. Anecdotally people are saying that newer shelter providers
 - Will JOHS be making future allocations and will they consider right sizing pay
- Other issues include providers who have artificially suppressed pay rates because they have funding streams that cap administrative funds and have match requirements so the money does not go as far

The allocations to the extent that we have been recipients, dollars delivered late in the funding year and structurally difficult to add to compensation. e.g. hiring bonus as option was challenging because we could give hiring bonuses for staff recently started but couldn't give bonus to staff who were with us through the pandemic

JOHS should partner with provider organizations to talk about the potential allocations to see impact and best use and equity

Providers cannot treat staff working under JOHS contracts differently than staff working under other county projects. Many positions funded under other county contracts are not acting similarly to JOHS in terms - leads to contemplating internal equity in pay that is not only inequitable but may be illegal

- JOHS was explicitly aware of this point from the start of the wage study and is also part of why it took so long for the study to come out. The main thing delaying the release was JOHS internal turnover, hopeful that future work will not suffer from that. The second piece that slowed it down was funding coming from other county departments - proposed solutions needed to be vetted by county leadership
- Going forward HMA has been working closely with our director and county leadership and the lines of communication are more open and frequent now than at the time the wage study was happening - hopeful the work can happen in a more timely fashion and with some consistency with county sources

The wage study is not the first time we have understood this problem. What strategies have providers been using to address this issue?

- Wage equity is really important. What one provider does is make an effort to do fundraising year round so that when a funding stream like SHS comes in and provides additional dollars for staff paid for by that, that we have discretionary dollars or dollars restricted for wages and benefits from other source like grants and individual donors that we can use for those non-SHS funded position, so everyone is getting the same percentage increase. But that is a lot of work and a lot of time and if we could address this wage equity issue within the contracting within the county as a whole that would lessen the burden on organizations to go out and raise money. Not every organization can go out and raise money
- These are issues that are hard to solve at the individual organization level and need to be solved on a systemic level. Created an emergency fund to make individual grants to staff members who fall into potential emergency situations. Adding time off. It is really a struggle and needs a systemic solution. Trying to raise the profile of this issue with all funders and lock arms with peers. A good place to start is to look at its own wages and make a policy for contracts that should fund employees at the same level and benefits as the county would pay
 - We have lost a lot of staff to county employment and exit interviews tell us that it is almost always related to compensation, insurance, and benefits. We are competing for a similar labor pool

What other sources should we reach out to in this push?

- City - uneven allocations and COLAs
- State pass through dollars
 - Uneven COLAs really feed inequity
- Non profit Association of Oregon is hosting policy labs on uneven compensation - going to look at how they managed their campaign in NY
- Oregon Solutions - state-wide solutions orientated project to try to create some kind of movement towards living wages in all of Oregon's human services funded system

Additionally, the COLA allocation by % is also flawed if the starting base is inequitable and uneven

As an organization, we gave different COLA increases based on pay grades. The lower the pay grade, the more COLA and the higher pay got slightly less increased COLA.

Origin of this issue is in the fact that initial contract levels were set on a wage scale that assumed that you took a vow of poverty and you were a do-gooder and there is a philosophical change but where the issue got compounded is that COLAs are almost always tied to consumer price index the challenge is that housing is not calculated in CPI so the contract rates and revenue level are not factoring the single biggest costs that employees have to meet. Raising contract levels at the same rate as the rise in the cost of housing would be more appropriate

JOHS: There is not only a case for increasing staff compensation and benefits just because we feel bad but we also want to improve the effectiveness of the services that are being provided

and improve the effectiveness of our funding and the research we do at JOHS is to achieve that end goal. Not sure if the research has been effective enough to making that link to the wages being paid and the effectiveness of services being provided and I wonder if bringing that out more in future research would get through to folks in positions of leadership? Future research could get some sort of estimate of that e.g. stay in job, building skills, so services were provided better . We are building bricks in this wall of evidence but we need a really big brick.

- I wonder if how we start making that brick is having these really intentional conversations frequently. Looking at real time data. Looking at base wages. JOHS technical assistance to build salary structures. How do we compare all of us? How are we defining our jobs? How do we make this normalized, regular conversations where we are making decisions together?
- It is not just about the COLA, it is about the base of the pay. At some point we cannot be satisfied with incremental change. At some point we need to overhaul the system and in order to do that we cannot do incremental change. Would love to see JOHS take a lead on this and say with all of our contract providers, we have heard everyone and say that this is what a living wage is across the board and here is funding to make this happen. Just give us the money to make it happen. Get everyone up to where it is equitable for everyone across providers. Why would we be paying wages and benefits that are not up to par with county and city when we are county and city providers. The administrative arm that makes it happen cannot be part of the contract itself. That has to be at a higher level and that is JOHS role as I see it as the holder of the money. Also want to elevate the point about all the funding streams but by the time that gets to the service providers it should not be up to them to keep those separated. It should not matter to the service providers where their funding comes from. Admin rate is also so low that we don't even get paid to do any of that.
- If JOHS started setting wage standards and set contracts to meet those wages. Sit down with orgs to then problem solve the other issues that come with that standard
 - The National Low Income Housing Coalition does an annual study called "Out of Reach" that looks at housing affordability by income. Would be a helpful study to incorporate into the compensation discussion.
<https://nlihc.org/news/nlihc-releases-out-reach-2023-high-cost-housing>
 - Portland clean energy fund set standards:
<https://www.portland.gov/bps/cleanenergy/workforce-and-contractor-equity/information-workers#:~:text=%40portlandoregon.gov.-,PCEF%20Wage%20Requirements,minimum%20wage%20requirements%20at%20BOLI>

In the last couple years we have had a unique opportunity to see what happened because of COVID and the impacts and how it changed the work culture and what it changed in terms of the value of the direct service and the value of the front line worker. We moved to a work culture that could do work remotely but that is not the same for all of our workforce e.g. 24/7 shelter that need to open regardless of what is happening and the JOHS did provide Hazard pay and that was significant to honor the work they do and value the work they do. To the extent that JOHS was able to support the budget for providers to keep folks at that pay and that was very significant. Thinking of compensation and thinking of it for direct service staff cannot be done

remotely. It is not a hybrid option for them. The impact of homelessness because of COVID have significantly increased as well. Not increasing budgets just because of COLA but because we value the direct services that are needed. Folks are not just going for the compensation but the convenience of remote and working from home. If we don't increase wages to show value for folks in direct service then we will have more impacts to quality of work, to maintaining staffing, and maintaining morale. When it is just COLA and doesn't take into consideration these factors. We all have operational expenses increases and so we have to look at it a little more holistically. If we are just talking about COLAs we are not going to get as far.

When is the next conversation about this so we can keep talking?

- This is future planning and our office wants to follow up and have more talks around this. In organizing those talks we will want to coordinate the project with HMA, given that I am not sure when we will reconvene but we will need to because this is the beginning of the conversation

Next steps: Last year in our analysis for SHS (required reporting of metro), we had a small section on workforce equity reporting and there was a survey to SHS providers about spread of compensation so we are hoping to expand on that in the next SHS annual report and there will be a larger group of providers than in the current report. It sounds like folks are interested in having more up-to-date information and the hope is that we can partner in that data collection. Balancing the burden of what we ask with what we can offer and that will be part of the work we do as well

Selected CHAT from the session:

[JOHS]:

<https://live-johs.pantheonsite.io/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/REVISED-JOHS-CCB-Study-August2023.pdf>

[JOHS]:

https://multnomah.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=3&clip_id=2789&meta_id=169385

[Provider]: The funds we got at the very end of the last FY was unspent SHS funds spend before the corrective action plan.

[Provider]: I'll add the COLA allocation by % is also flawed if the starting base is inequitable and uneven

[Provider]: As an org, we gave different COLA increases based on pay grades. The lower the pay grade, the more COLA and the higher pay got slightly less increase COLA.

[JOHS]: Thanks for sharing! I think it's helpful to learn provider strategies like this

[Provider]: The National Low Income Housing Coalition does an annual study called "Out of Reach" that looks at housing affordability by income. Would be a helpful study to incorporate into the compensation discussion.

<https://nlihc.org/news/nlihc-releases-out-reach-2023-high-cost-housing>

[Provider]: the point is so critical especially now with so much money from the SHS tax.

[Provider]:

<https://www.portland.gov/bps/cleanenergy/workforce-and-contractor-equity/information-workers#:~:text=%40portlandoregon.gov-,PCEF%20Wage%20Requirements,minimum%20wage%20requirements%20at%20BOLI>.