

Rural Recruiting: A Methodology for Finding Participants While Building Sustainable Networks

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Background

The Regional Transition Navigator Services (RTNS) is a new West Virginia program that started accepting enrollees on March 1, 2022. The program works with individuals who are aged 14-25 who have histories of severe mental illness, substance use disorder, or who are or are likely to become homeless. The program connects referred individuals to local, regional, and state resources and opportunities. This program allows for referrals to come from all sources, including individuals themselves, but also parents, guardians, providers, and anyone who feels a referral is necessary. The program is designed to work with individuals who would otherwise disconnect from available sources of support.

Challenges

West Virginia is a rural state comprised of 55 counties spread across small communities often isolated from one another by infrastructure and geography. Its total population is roughly 1,783,000.

The RTNS operates throughout West Virginia, but has limited resources to make possible clients aware of the program's existence and availability. These limitations include staffing and travel budget.

Objectives

Primary: Utilizing minimal resources, find individuals who fit the program's profile.

Secondary: Create a sustainable network of statewide partners able to make referrals to the program.

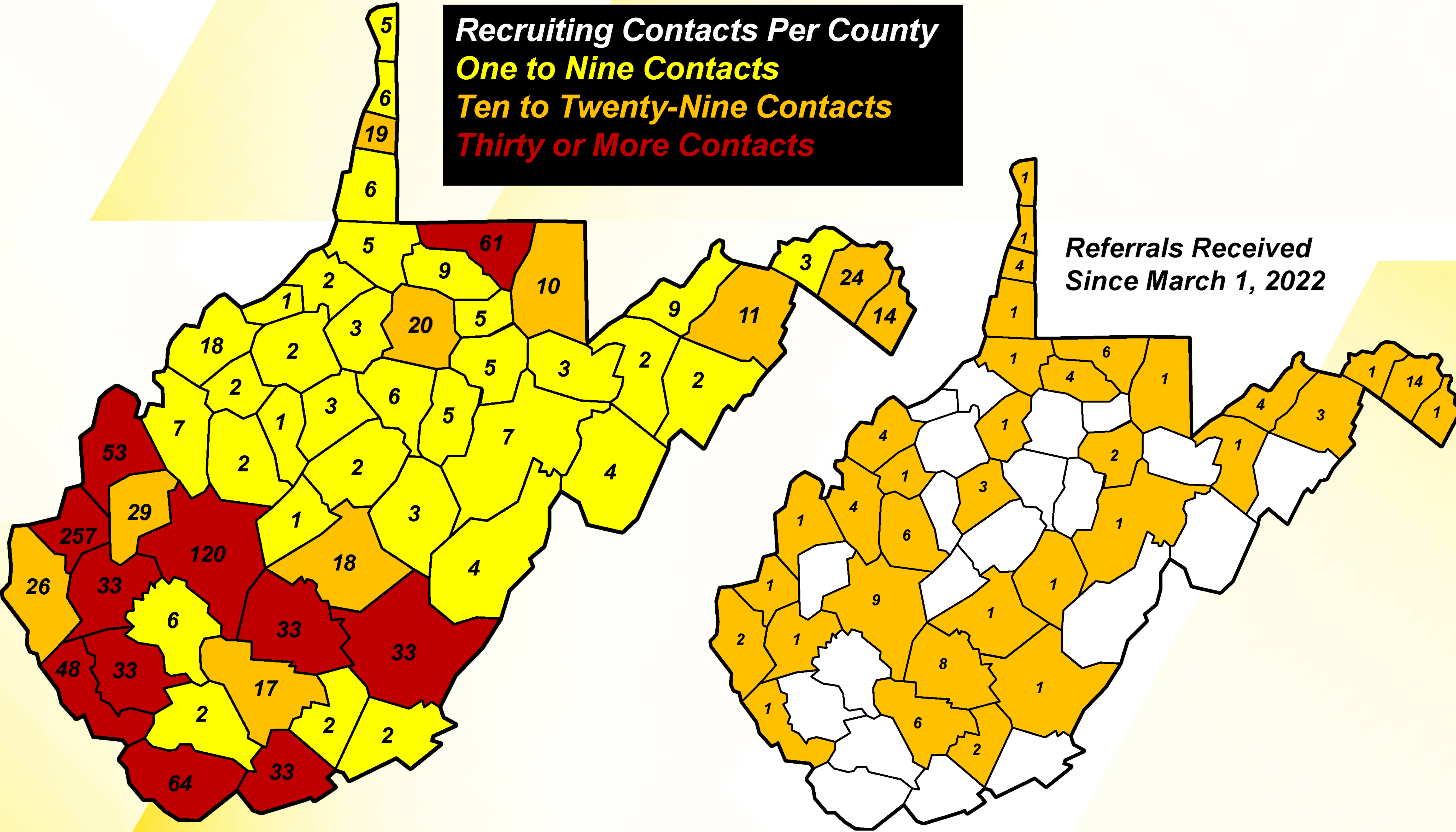
Approach

- Create a grassroots network of community members who work with eligible individuals
- Target outreach to professionals who could make referrals rather than direct clients
- Teachers, counselors, social workers, medical professionals, coaches, pastors, police, and anybody else who might be in positions likely to meet individuals that fit the RTNS profile.
- Create email list of social service agencies, schools, health departments, psychiatric institutions, shelters, and other resources of potential interest to referred individuals.
- **Disseminate weekly emails with program information and referral form links to network**

Rather than stretching already limited resources thinner on in-person recruiting events or content distribution strategies (neither of which are guaranteed to reach targeted individuals), this approach allows the RTNS to contact a network throughout the entire state on a weekly basis, effectively increasing the program's statewide reach from its six teammates to a list of more than 1650 individuals.

Ease of Use

In its most basic design, implementing this method incurs the labor cost associated with assembling the initial mailing list, the creation of the contact message itself and the establishment of lines of communication back into the program. Depending upon the scope of outreach, this can be completed within a month, and if in a crunch, likely within a week, especially if free resources (like the Google platform) can be used. From there, it is a matter of creating the contact schedule and being responsive.



Results

RTNS is able to recruit all of West Virginia's 55 counties. In eight months of receiving referrals, RTNS has received referrals from 34 counties total. These counties account for 76 percent of West Virginia's total population.

Disadvantages

Because this approach is an outlier to traditional marketing designed to target potential clients directly, projects can encounter institutional objection to implementation.

This approach does not produce the direct marketing materials that are often considered contractual deliverables in funded activities.

Advantages

Beyond the associated labor costs of obligating staffing resources to create the initial mailing list, the costs are virtually zero. Nothing needs to be printed, nor distributed, nor do events need to be staffed, thus saving the program costs on travel/shipping/postage.

- This approach:
- Can be executed via free and widely available platform resources (such as Google's Workspace Suite).
 - Allows RTNS to more easily find potential clients who do not want to be found.
 - Creates of a list of contacts throughout the state

Because the contact mechanism is so widespread (RTNS's current weekly mailing list is currently more than 1650), only a few individuals have to respond each week for the approach to be productive.

Travel Time Map

