

# WAPDD NEWS

A Quarterly Publication brought to you by Western Arkansas Planning & Development District

## A Message from Our Executive Director Sasha Grist

This newsletter brings us into a new year – one filled with excitement and hope for continual positive strides to overcome this pandemic that we have unbelievably experienced for over a year. As I look back, I am proud of our WAPDD staff and all our local leadership and communities in our District. We continue to learn from the experiences that we have had, but we have shown so much resiliency, ability to adapt quickly, and innovative thinking. All of these qualities, along with our passion for our communities, have helped us attain many successes this past year. With new grants and programs becoming available in this upcoming year, our staff is here to support our District and local governments. Please reach out to us and let us know what ideas you have for the future as well as any challenges your area might be facing. Our District is looking forward to more relationship building, more project meetings, more project ideas, and increased public involvement. We look forward as always to working together with our communities and leaders.



## WELCOME!!

Ashlie Ross  
Workforce Quality Assurance Lead

Ashlie Ross joined the WAPDD team in January 2021 as the Workforce Department Quality Assurance Lead. Prior to joining the District, Ashlie worked for the North Country Chamber of Commerce.

She and her boyfriend Mark are new to the state of Arkansas and are patiently waiting on warm weather so they can explore any and every state park with their two dogs, Kayak and Ewok.

Ashlie holds a Bachelor of Arts from Jacksonville State University (Alabama) where she majored in English and minored in Sociology. When she's not working, you can find her reading, cooking, or on FaceTime with her niece, Bee.



## EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

Meet Kim Bartlett  
Financial/Workforce Accountant



- **How long have you worked at WAPDD?** Started July 1, 2019
- **Favorite part about working at WAPDD?** I love that I have been given the opportunity to do what I love and continue to grow and learn with an amazing team of coworkers.
- **What 3 words describes you best?** Faithful, Determined, Organized
- **Do you have a hobby?** Crafting and Sewing
- **What motivates you?** My faith in God and my family.

## Community Development Corner

Spring brings warming temperatures, increasing hours of daylight, and for Western Arkansas Planning and Development District, Outdoor Recreation Grants Program applications which are due August 27. The Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage, and Tourism offers 2 grants under the Outdoor Recreation Grants Program or ORGP, the FUN Park Grant and the Matching Grant. The FUN Park Grant has a maximum award of up to \$75,000 with no match required. It is available to municipalities with populations of 2,500 or less and unincorporated communities sponsored by their county governments. The Matching Grant is available to all municipalities and counties with a maximum award of up to \$250,000 with an equal match by the applicant. The Matching Grant is a reimbursable program meaning that once a project is approved, the awardee pays for all eligible project costs with up to 50% being reimbursed.

A unique aspect of the Matching Grant application is Community Outreach. While Community Outreach should play a vital role in all your projects, ORGP takes it a step further and includes points for it in the Matching Grant scoring criteria. While it is not included in the FUN Park Grant application, it is always a good idea to demonstrate community input and support for your project. Typically, ORGP applications would require a public meeting, but that requirement has been waived due to COVID, making Community Outreach even more valuable. Community Outreach differs from a public meeting in that it is more personal. Rather than an open invitation for the general public to attend a meeting, Community Outreach is more targeted and focuses on individuals and smaller groups such as ethnic/racial minority persons, persons with special needs, senior citizens, school children, etc. In-person meetings should be documented with name of group contacted, date of contact or meeting, sign-in or registration sheet, minutes or notes of input received. Past examples of Community Outreach used for ORGP applications have included surveys completed by elementary students or Boys and Girls Club members and meetings at senior citizen centers or facilities that serve disable adults. WAPDD has developed several surveys and forms to assist ORGP applicants with documenting Community Outreach. Additionally, ORGP will accept social media posts and media broadcast as Community Outreach.

For more information on the ORGP application requirements and how to maximize your Community Outreach efforts for these and other grant applications contact WAPDD Director of Community Development, Tracee McKenna.

## Cossatot Senior Citizens Center



Pictured: Cossatot Senior Citizens Center Staff

The Cossatot Senior Citizens Center near Wickes in Polk County will be better equipped to serve area seniors with the completion of its new addition. In 2019, Polk County applied for and was awarded an Arkansas Economic Development Commission General Assistance grant for the construction of the addition which houses a new pantry and walk-in freezer. The \$198,439 award doubles the food storage space of the Center which serves breakfast and lunch. The addition also includes a larger area for the packaging and loading of meals to be delivered to homebound seniors. AEDC provided an additional \$11,000 in grant funds for the Center after water damage was identified along the front of the building by the contractor working on the addition. With that damage repaired and the addition complete, the Cossatot Senior Citizens Center is eager to return to in-person meals at the facility after COVID forced them to shut down a year ago.

# Civic Innovation Challenge

Across the country, communities have needs ripe for innovative solutions - from rethinking transit and housing affordability to operating safe schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Civic Innovation Challenge, led by the U.S. National Science Foundation in partnership with the U.S. Department of Energy and U.S. Department of Homeland Security, seeks to empower communities to address those needs by establishing research partnerships that can achieve not just local impacts but potentially be scaled up regionally, or even nationally. The Civic Innovation Challenge has now taken a major step by naming 52 teams across 30 states as well as tribal regions, Washington DC and Puerto Rico as Stage-1 awardees.

Teams comprise civic partners - such as local, state and tribal officials and non-profit and community leaders - working together with researchers. Each team will receive \$50,000 to refine their concepts over four months. At the end of that period, NSF will select State-2 awardees, which will each receive awards of up to \$1 million for ready-to-implement pilot projects with the potential to produce scalable, sustainable, and transferable solutions to address community-identified challenges.

In early March 2020, MPO Director Reese Brewer lectured at the University of Arkansas' Department of Civil Engineering - Dr. Hernandez's graduate class. UA Department of Civil Engineering proposed collaborating on appropriate grant opportunities. As a result, Frontier MPO, the City of Fort Smith, and UA successfully partnered to receive Stage 1 funding to study potential micromobility options to vulnerable communities. Frontier MPO is serving as the Co-Principal Investigator on this project. Successful Civic Innovation Challenge Stage 2 recipients will receive funding to implement and evaluate their projects.

SMILIES (Shared Micromobility for affordable-accessible housing), brings diverse and often unheard voices together to improve access to jobs and essential activities - from getting groceries, going to school, and receiving care. Vulnerable residents can help transform transportation equity and bring economic stability to distressed and historically marginalized neighborhoods. Specifically aimed at affordable housing communities in small and mid-sized cities along with rural areas, the SMILIES pilot project will install shared micromobility (SMM) services, such as e-bikes and e-scooters in high-risk communities in Fort Smith, Arkansas. The outcomes and goals of SMILIES is to determine the impact that SMM services can have on household transportation costs, job access, energy consumption, and more.

## Key Partnerships - University of Arkansas & National Science Foundation Stage 1 Grant

Shared Micromobility for affordable-accessible housing (SMILIES)

UA serves as principal investigator; Frontier MPO serves as civic co-principal investigator

- Identify low-income job locations & historically marginalized communities in Fort Smith - the Rogers Avenue Corridor is one of these areas.
- Identify Stakeholders & Partners - Accomplished through the Rogers Avenue Transportation & Health Planning Framework.
- Determine business model & deployment strategies.



# Diamond Park Complex

In addition to the \$40,000 grant funding from National Recreation and Park Association, Frontier MPO won on behalf of Crawford County another grant from the NRPA for \$19,900.00 to increase equitable access to the Diamond Park Complex. The grant funding is given in coordination with 10 Minute Walk - a campaign dedicated to improving access to parks and green spaces while positively transforming communities. The grant funding provided by NRPA will help strengthen these efforts and Crawford County will receive ongoing technical assistance, professional development and access to networks of like-minded park and recreation professional throughout the country.

# Stark Manufacturing

Western Arkansas Workforce Development is working with Stark Manufacturing in Paris, AR to start an Industrial Manufacturing Technician Apprenticeship program to help them develop machine operators for upward mobility within the company to maintenance, quality, tooling, and production leadership positions. This is an exciting opportunity for the company to design, control, and implement the program to meet their need for training quality, key personnel.

Stark Manufacturing has been providing world class service and product to original equipment manufacturers and system integrators servicing many industries including automotive, heavy truck, military, marine, and agriculture for over 26 years. Their 120,000 square foot facility features automated equipment, a highly skilled workforce and lean practices allowing them to provide exceptional product at a competitive price. Specializing in precision tube forming, tube and hose assemblies, CNC machining and value add services.

"Serving on our local workforce board has allowed me to learn about the opportunities available through our workforce delivery system to partner with those service providers and provide feedback to those providers about the needs of private industry. Unfortunately, there are times when as small company, we do not have the resources available to address many barriers to employment to community members or training to give more opportunities for upward mobility beyond entry level operators. By utilizing workforce partners' experience and expertise through initiatives like this apprenticeship program, we are able to think outside the box and develop talent organically, giving members of our community a better quality of life and making Stark Manufacturing more competitive in the global marketplace." - Rachel Mize, President of Stark Manufacturing

For more information on this and other Workforce Development programs, contact the Director of Workforce Development, Dennis Williamson.

## Western Arkansas Planning & Development District

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"Our mission is to foster community and economic growth in our local economy by providing community and economic development, workforce innovation, transportation and emergency planning and various other professional services in support of our Region. We are the central catalyst for community-centered economic development that links our counties, cities and businesses with state, federal and private resources to aid in a higher quality of life while promoting future growth for all citizens of Western Arkansas."

Are you on social media? We are too! Connect with us and get to know us better. Our social media platforms are a great way to learn more about WAPDD.



Do you have a community event coming up and need help spreading the word? Send your event info to us and we'll share on all of our social media accounts!

Email Event info to: [amandagrist@wapdd.org](mailto:amandagrist@wapdd.org)



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