

CASE STUDY - STRATEGIC TERRITORY EXPANSION

GIRLS ON THE RUN MID STATE PA

OVERVIEW

One of the strategies that allowed the Girls on the Run organization to continue to thrive during and post the pandemic was **strengthening the council network through mergers and territory expansion**. In FY19, there were 210 councils covering 74% of the population. In FY23 there were 44 fewer councils (166), but the councils were covering 75.6% of the population. Neighboring sister councils that had the staff capacity, infrastructure, financial stability, and support from their board merged with less sustainable sister councils to strengthen their resources, reach, and impact. These mergers and territory expansions proved to be very successful, especially in continuing to deliver on our mission.

In January 2021 Girls on the Run Mid State PA (formerly GOTR Capital Area) expanded from 7 counties to 17 counties by merging with former Girls on the Run Central PA and former Girls on the Run York (affiliate). This case study showcases the council's opportunity, solution, experience, and **positive outcome of a large territory expansion that included two mergers**.

COUNCIL QUICK FACTS – GOTR MID STATE PA

Pre-territory expansion (2021)	Current day (2023)
Council established in 2011	Tier 5 and 12 years old
22 girls served in their first season	2,406 girls served (FY23) 17,646 total girls served (YTD FY23)
Between 2014-2016 expanded from two counties to six counties	17 counties
Served 1,861 girls in FY19 – council was on track to hit or exceed girls served in FY20	Served 2,406 girls in FY23
50% scholarship rate	42.4% scholarship rate (FY23)
2019 Staff Model (3.5 FTE): Executive Director (FT), Program Director (FT), Program Coordinator (PT), Program Events Manager (FT)	2023 Staff Model (6 FTE): Executive Director (FT), Program Director (FT), 3 Regional Program Coordinator (FT), 1 PT Program Coordinator (operations/PW, GLA, compliance), Corporate & Community Relations Manager (FT); outsource grant writing with a company.

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OPPORTUNITY

Both former GOTR York and former GOTR Central PA were impacted by the global pandemic beyond recovery and needed to seek alternative ways of serving girls. Former GOTR Central PA did not have the financial reserves, board engagement or staff capacity to continue to serve girls and former GOTR York was a small affiliate that was reprioritizing program goals.

GOTR Mid State PA had strong pre-existing relationships with these two sister councils and a substantial understanding of the immediate larger territory surrounding their council. Because of this, GOTR Mid State PA was able to conduct intentional discussions with these two sister councils about how they could continue to **serve girls and strengthen their impact if they joined forces.**

GOTR Mid State felt they were well positioned to explore this opportunity because of the following:

- Strong staff capacity
- Infrastructure to build upon
- Financial stability and reserves
- Preexisting relationships with the former councils
- Already providing support to GOTR York
- High-performing program
- Community relationships
- Support from their board
- Past success
- Plan to incorporate into strategic planning

COURSE OF ACTION

Territory expansion was part of GOTR Mid State PA's recovery plan from the impacts of the global pandemic. The council knew that girls needed the program more than ever and they were excited to explore expansion.

Past Success: GOTR Mid State PA had successfully expanded its territory several times before (Perry County; then Adams/Franklin County, then Lebanon County) and knew the positive impacts it could have for the girls, community, and council. The success of the first territory expansion was largely due to a school principal who served as a community champion. The council knew that growing from 6 counties to 17 counties would be very different than their previous expansions as it was on a much larger scale.

Data-driven: The exploration process was data-driven and led primarily by the council staff anticipating there may be some initial board resistance. The council staff knew they would need to provide compelling data for the board to entertain the opportunity. The data was compelling, and this allowed the GOTR Mid State PA board to have thoughtful discussions before voting on

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each expansion. Some of the major data points reviewed for the potential council mergers included:

- Current girls served and growth trajectory over the past 3 years in each of the new council regions
- Additional girls served in the expanded region to support pandemic build-back
- Saturation and opportunities in unserved areas or low-served areas
- Finances including contributed vs. earned income from potential councils and GOTR Mid State PA's financial standing
 - GOTR Mid State PA's board knew that they had enough reserves to float the merger during the transition phase if need be
- Funders – where are the community foundations and can they support new growth?
- Demographics (diversity data, income data, # girls age 8-13, school data, etc.)
- Scholarship rates
- Territory landscape (urban vs. rural) and # of school districts in each county
- Preexisting relationships to leverage
- Who are the community champions?

Short-term goal setting: After reviewing the data the council assembled preliminary goals for girls served and revenue to support the growth and launched into their first season prepared to take it slow, acclimate, adjust, and learn.

Evaluation of progress: After year one, while the council made some progress towards girls served to build back in each former territory, they identified that the staff model needed to be restructured, expanded, and strengthened sooner than expected. It was essential to have a local program coordinator in Central PA who understands the community present in this area. The territory of former GOTR Central PA was the furthest from the central office so the council also added a small central office in the center of the region. In year two, two program coordinators were hired to support North Central PA and South-Central PA and in year three, a third program coordinator was hired to support the Capital Area. In total, there are three full-time program coordinators and one part-time (one in each region) managed by a program director in the Capital Area.

Advisory committee: In addition to strengthening the staff structure with a regional model an advisory committee was established in the North Central PA region to build connections within the territory, leverage local knowledge, and support growth strategies. The advisory committee is comprised of local business leaders, community leaders, coaches, local chambers of commerce representatives, past board members, and teachers. The program coordinator for the North Central region also serves on this advisory committee and joined the local chamber of commerce. The advisory committee also serves as a great pipeline to board service. It was important to the council that the board reflected the bigger geographic footprint.

Long-term goal setting: In year two, the board and staff participated in a one-day intensive strategic planning session facilitated and supported by their GOTRI regional director. Now that the council had a full year of data, it was time to evaluate and draft a long-term plan.



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OUTCOMES

92% build back to girls served in spring 2019 between all 17 counties: You can see from the chart below that once a full-time program coordinator was hired specifically for the South-Central and North-Central region, girls served started to increase and exceed 2019 numbers. This allowed the council to build relationships in the communities, build pipelines to board service, recruit and support coaches, outreach to schools and sites, and conduct site visits.

- **191%** build back in year two for South Central PA territory.
- **121%** build back in year three for North Central PA.
- **81%** build back in year three for Capital Area

FORMER COUNCILS & TERRITORY	SPRING 2019 GIRLS SERVED	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3
		SPRING 2021 GIRLS SERVED - MERGED COUNCIL	SPRING 2022 GIRLS SERVED - MERGED COUNCIL	SPRING 2023 GIRLS SERVED - MERGED COUNCIL
GOTR York (South Central PA)	180	134 	344	239
GOTR Central PA (North Central PA)	351	100 	292	423
GOTR Capital Area	1,281	433	885	1,014
	1,812	667	1,521	1,676 (92x)

CHALLENGES

- There can be a period of adjustment with aligning the council culture, program policies, operations, and expectations
- Figuring out the best staff model took a year
- Understanding the community, building authentic connections, and having a local presence

SUCCESSES & BEST PRACTICES

- Data-driven process
- Regional staff model
- Advisory Committee in North Central PA
- Leverage any preexisting committees, board members or relationships (ie: York County had an active 5K that has remained active)
- Networking
- Developed a strategic plan that incorporated the expansion goals and the plan is monitored and evaluated