

NACCHO/CDC Accreditation Support Initiative

New York State Association of County Health Officials

Final Report

1. Project Overview

NYSACHO contracted with a consultant from the New York Council of Nonprofits, NYCON, to provide consultation services to four county health departments in NY State to develop strategic plans as part of the preparation for accreditation. The four counties were; Herkimer, a small rural county, Chautauqua, a medium size county, Dutchess, a large county and Westchester, a very large county.

The NYCON consultant held an initial planning call with NYSACHO and the project participants. She then requested and received the counties' Community Health Assessments, budgets, organization charts, and other governance information. All of these materials were reviewed by the consultant. A survey was developed and reviewed by the participants. NYCON then customized the survey for each participant to meet their individual needs. The survey was administered via "Survey Monkey" to employees, members of the Board of Health, and in several of the counties to County Legislators. Dutchess County also administered a separate survey to their community partners. NYCON then did an analysis of the surveys to share with the leadership teams in each county.

NYCON held a planning retreat with each participating county. From this, a draft strategic plan was developed for each county. NYCON then met with the participating teams and reviewed and revised the draft documents resulting in each of the four local health departments having a finalized strategic plan.

NYSACHO held a webinar on "Applying the NYSACHO Model Strategic Plans to Your Local Health Department". 45 of the 58 New York State local health departments participated. A total of 88 individuals from these local health departments participated. The webinar is posted on NYSACHO's web site in the members' only section.

The final strategic plans along with copies of the templates and surveys have been posted on NYSACHO's web site for members only. It is anticipated that other NY State local health departments will utilize these tools to assist them in developing their own strategic plan to use as part of the accreditation process.

2. Reflections: Successes, Challenges, and Lessons Learned

By establishing a model approach to strategic planning, NYSACHO was able to engage participating Health Departments in a structure process that facilitated engagement and planning. This approach allowed for some flexibility and customization but maintained a structure that, with strong project management, was able to accomplish significant results within a tight timeline. By facilitating four planning processes simultaneously, the planning consultant was able to cross-pollinate ideas to better assist each department in the development of customized survey tools, agendas, and ultimately a plan document that reflected the unique needs and priorities of each Department.

The project did not encounter any significant barriers or challenges and each Department successfully completed their strategic plan according to their own specifications.

Some of the lessons learned include:

- There is a great deal of confusion and uncertainty about accreditation in general and about the expectations for the Community Health Improvement Plan.
- Strategic Planning can be a positive opportunity to pro-actively engage staff and community partners. It is preferable to engage staff who are interested and want to be involved in planning. The planning process may tend to serve as a forum to address immediate issues or unresolved personnel concerns, especially if there have been recent significant funding and staff cuts.
- Rather than focus on program specific analysis, it is preferable to focus on broad and cross-cutting issues such as quality improvement and data analysis.
- Depending on the Department's organizational structure, assigning responsibilities can be challenging and require creativity to continue to engage staff at all levels.

The project utilized best practices in strategic planning but was not able to clearly define expectations as related to Accreditation. Some of the PHAB and NACCHO tools developed after the project's start would have been useful at the beginning.

3. Impact and Next Steps

One of the main outcomes of this project is the completion of strategic plans for four local health departments in New York State. The process of developing these plans was a very positive one for each of the local health departments. Several said that it strengthened their staffs and departments.

This project has provided NYSACHO with some very valuable tools to assist other local health departments in developing strategic plans for their agency. This will assist them with one requirement in the national accreditation process.

The training for all Health Departments served to demystify strategic planning and demonstrate that although the process does require a concerted and organized effort, it can be undertaken by Departments of all sizes. Several of these Departments have indicated that they are interested in

strategic planning and would benefit from additional resources to support consulting services.

NYSACHO plans on continuing to seek opportunities to assist and support local public health departments in the process to attain national accreditation.

Herkimer County Department of Health (NY)

Strategic Planning Process

1. Project Overview

We developed a strategic plan for Herkimer County, a small, rural and poor county in the Adirondacks of New York. Our LHD has suffered progressive loss of funding locally, from New York State, and from Home Nursing Certified Home Health Agency revenues, and a proportional decline in professional staff.

Under the grant we met with NYSACHO and NYCON facilitators to develop a survey, analyze the survey, meet to assess the LHD status, mission, future goals, SWOT analysis, and plan a retreat. The retreat became diluted somewhat by strength of disruptive understaff, but nonetheless used that catharsis to develop a very tangible strategic action plan. Finally, with strong editorial help and facilitation, a writing and analysis of the assessments produced a practical gameplan for future progress.

The completion of the draft plan will lead to presentation of the draft to the governing authority in June, 2012.

A significant accomplishment is the planning for a significant restructuring that will strengthen the LHD by building skills, broadening responsibilities and training opportunities, and improving the functioning of the LHD unit.

2. Reflections: Successes, Challenges, and Lessons Learned

Strategies: open unhindered access of LHD staff to planning, survey and retreat.
Openness lead to acceptance and trust in the process, as well as buy-in to recommendations.

Barriers and challenges: some reluctance at highest (legislative) level to participate in survey or process.

Brazenness and animosity of some of the participants to many of the aspects of the process, and indeed, the organization, was quite significant.

We would have benefitted from having much more upper level interest in the process; and by having an adequate opportunity for motivated individuals to dramatically express their opinions. However, our communal process instead lead to some bullying or suppression of management viewpoints.

I think we might have benefitted from a you-tube type video explaining what this was supposed to be about, and with suggestions and review of proper behavior and conduct during the retreat and process. This could have been sent out before the survey, to prepare participants as discussed above and below. This might help prepare staff with the idea that it is meant to accomplish change, not just be a protest or negative event.

Actually, the spirited nature of the retreat was very much a good thing, and demonstrated management's willingness to listen, accept criticism and move forward.

3. Impact and Next Steps

The impact of this grant was remarkable, in that it really and truly wasn't anything new, or anything we didn't already know.

The openness and harsh words of the process were helpful in that it was revealed that many staff really bleed for their LHD, and really care about its future. That bleeding created a new respect for each other's commitment. Like a photograph: "Why didn't you tell me I looked like that?" Staff now talks about the Mission Statement as a reason they do things – not just the former 9-4 mentality.

This has advanced our preparation extensively, because accreditation wasn't really in our plans. Quality improvement has always been important for us, and that hasn't changed.

Plans for the next 12 months are to solidify some of the tangible markers of quality achievement, and greater relish in the presentation of accomplishments to ourselves and the legislative community.

Chautauqua County Department of Health (NY)

Strategic Planning Process

1. Project Overview

Chautauqua County is the western gateway to New York State, located in its extreme southwest corner between Buffalo, NY and Erie, PA. The county is bordered by PA to the south and west, Cattaraugus County, NY to the east, and Erie County, NY and Lake Erie to the north. Chautauqua County is comprised of two cities, Dunkirk and Jamestown, twenty-seven towns, and fifteen villages that cover 1065 square miles with a population of 134,905 at the time of the 2010 census. By census definition, 58.8% of the County's population resides in urban areas, while 41.2% resides in rural areas. The vast geographic area of the County coupled with the fact that almost half of its residents are sparsely populated throughout the rural area lends itself to transportation and access challenges. It is also important to recognize that the County is geographically and somewhat socially and economically, divided into two regions. The "north county" region includes the City of Dunkirk. The "south county" region encompasses the City of Jamestown, the County's largest population center. Chautauqua County Health Department (CCHD) services include Community Health Assessment, Disease Control Programs, Family Health Services including Family Planning, Health Education and Promotion, Public Health Emergency Preparedness, Early Intervention, and Environmental Health Services. Services are offered to the community through three main service sites: Mayville, Jamestown, and Dunkirk.

Activities between November 2011 and May 2012 included initial and on-going phone conferences with our facilitator, preparing and disseminating the survey, gathering a work group consisting of managers from each division as well as our Junior Planner to review findings and begin work. During this time we also met face-to-face with our facilitator and collectively put our plan together. We had a high survey participation rate and the results really enlightened all of us. The process helped us to redefine our mission and lay the ground work for important and necessary initiatives.

2. Reflections: Successes, Challenges, and Lessons Learned

As a medium-sized LHD, I first enlisted only my Deputy in the strategic planning process. She was familiar with strategic planning where as other members of my management team were not – this posed a challenge. Together, we worked with our facilitator to personalize the survey and establish a work group. Through education and communication, we were able to get buy-in from the division managers who made up the work group; this was essential. Providing the group with the survey results prior to our in person meeting worked very well as everyone was more prepared to really get to work. Thanks to the nice summary that our facilitator put together, we were able to collectively discuss and agree on our mission, values statement, and traits. Categorizing survey results into a SWOT analysis was very helpful. Another challenge was the short timeframe. I think that a longer period of time is needed to put action steps together and implement the plan. The facilitator is a critical component of this plan as we would not have been able to do this without her.

3. Impact and Next Steps

As a result of the work undertaken through this project, we were able to get a tremendous amount of feedback and actually listen to it and put it to use. A focus on prevention is a key factor in shaping the effectiveness of our community health and environmental health programs. A renewed focus on internal and external communication is critical to fulfilling our mission. Through maximizing opportunities for collaboration, health education, and continuous quality improvement, the Chautauqua County Department of Health will remain a leader in promoting health and preventing disease for the residents and visitors of our County. Our goals are realistic and achievable:

- Chautauqua County DOH will have an informed, engaged, and committed team of employees.
- Chautauqua County DOH will strengthen our involvement with strategic initiatives that support and enhance Departmental goals and community needs.
- Chautauqua County DOH will facilitate targeted educational initiatives in collaboration with community partners.
- Chautauqua County DOH will continue to ensure quality services and take continual steps towards overall quality improvement.
- Chautauqua County DOH will continually strive for an effective and efficient use of data and information management.

This work has definitely advanced our preparation for accreditation and will improve our quality improvement process. Our plans for this year include establishing and implementing employee and community communication plans. We uncovered a need for renewed focus on health education and are planning our strategies to address this.

The Chautauqua County DOH truly appreciates being chosen to participate in this strategic planning process. We found it to be very valuable, especially in such uncertain financial times.

Dutchess County Department of Health

Strategic Planning Process

1. Project Overview

Dutchess County is in the heart of the Hudson Valley, midway between New York City and New York State's capital, Albany. According to the 2010 Census, the population of Dutchess County is 297,488 ranging from rural to urban communities. The make up is 80.1% whites, 9.9% Black, 0.3% American Indian/Alaska and 10.5% Hispanic/Latino. The median household income is \$69,613, median family income is \$81,868, families below the poverty level is 5.1% and individuals below the poverty level is 7.5%.

Working with our consultant from the New York Council of Nonprofits (NYCON) we held several planning conference calls, conducted a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) analysis through two on line surveys – one for staff and one for our stakeholders. Because we had engaged in this process previously, our task was to review our existing mission, values, goals and objectives and determine if they were still valid or needed adjustments.

The Strategic Planning Team held a “retreat” to review the SWOT data , and came up with revised mission, vision, goals and strategies. The Strategic Advisory Response Team (StART) reviewed and gave input on the information gathered from the SPT, and came up with specific objectives and activities for each goal. A second meeting of the SPT was held to finalize the first draft. We then held a joint session (SPT and StART) to review the plan and discuss its implementation, identifying responsible parties and timelines for all of our activities based on the goals and objectives derived.

2. Reflections: Successes, Challenges, and Lessons Learned

Since we had previously gone through this process a decade ago, we were knowledgeable of steps needed for successful implementation. We learned that engaging all levels of staff, is key in the development of an effective plan. We achieved this by asking for volunteers and getting an excellent cross section of departmental staff. The Strategic Advisory Response team (StART) was created allowing for a safe venue to brainstorm, identify salient issues for future planning and give a voice in the planning process.

One challenge was the tool itself. The original tool provided, was too generic. This posed the problem of not being able to get enough useful/relevant information. We were able to address this by utilizing a more effective tool provided by PHAB to tweak and redesign the survey. For other agencies, we would recommend they make sure that whatever tool they are using, is specific to their County's makeup, to help in the design and implementation of their strategic plan.

Another challenge we felt was that the timeframe was too short. We would have liked to have had the opportunity to hold focus groups to really capture the stakeholders' feedback. Based on this challenge, a recommendation for NACCHO or CDC to consider would be to allow enough time to

really devote to this process. Efficacy is better had when there is enough time for planning, designing, implementation and evaluation.

3. Impact and Next Steps

With a new County administration, the process of developing a strategic plan has provided the department with an opportunity to take inventory and assess if we are on an appropriate and sustainable course. Engaging staff and stakeholders, has provided cohesion for employees to deal with organizational, programmatic and funding changes. Realigning the Departments strategic plan to address changes in Public Health perspectives and funding, will help the Department prepare for the accreditation process and quality improvement efforts.

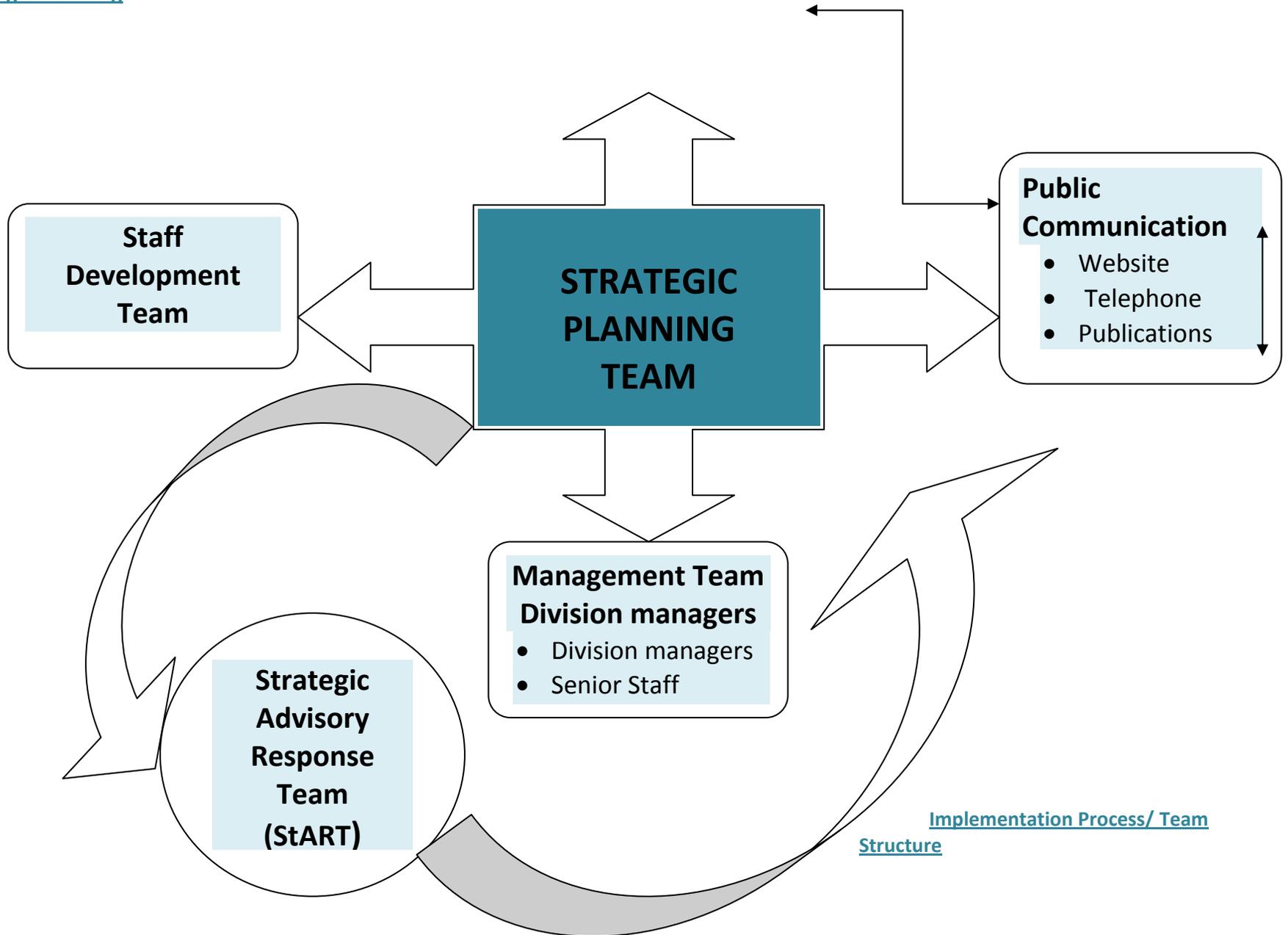
One issue that needs consideration is how to present the final plan to the entire staff. Developing enhanced and consistent communication is one of the activities identified in the plan. The Strategic Planning team suggested that senior management teams present the plan in smaller division meetings and possibly develop an internal webinar to introduce the staff to the plan.

Another implementation consideration is how to integrate the plan, the specific concepts and values detailed in the document, into the everyday work of the department. Because leadership support for the plan is essential to develop staff “buy in”, messages and guidance from the commissioner has been identified as a key activity in implementation.

Using a broad public health perspective as the base for implementing the plan, the team has begun to develop learning opportunities regarding accreditation and the ten essentials of Public Health. Because “timeframes and responsibilities” were identified in the plan, action teams were developed based on pertinent activities outlined in the plan. These action teams, along with their facilitators, will be responsible for the implementation, coordination and evaluation of the plan’s strategies. This builds a foundation for the teamwork and effort needed to become an accredited local health department over the next 1-2 years.

Attached is the chart developed showing the flow of all the teams and how they are integrated together, to continue the strong foundation we have begun to develop.

Strategic Planning



Westchester County Department of Health

Strategic Planning Process

1. Project Overview

Westchester County Department of Health (WCDH) is the local health department for Westchester County, a large, increasingly diverse county in New York with close to 1 million residents. The County, located just north of New York City, is comprised of communities ranging from urban, inner cities with health disparities that mirror those found in the neighboring inner city of The Bronx, to mixed income communities in small towns, villages and rural areas. The County also has a rich ethnic and cultural diversity that has been increasing over the past decade. Approximately 1 in 4 residents are now foreign-born and close to 1 in 3 speak a language other than English at home.

Through the project, WCDH collaborated with consultants from the New York Council of Non-profits (NYCON) to develop and execute a strategic planning process between January and May of 2012, which culminated in the development of WCDH's new strategic plan. The process included planning and coordination meetings with WCDH's strategic planning leadership team, division directors and senior staff; development and implementation of online surveys to obtain feedback from division directors, senior staff, the County Board of Health and frontline staff on WCDH's mission, vision, and values, strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats/challenges; two days of workgroup meetings focused on key themes and strategic goals identified from the surveys; and follow-up meetings with WCDH's strategic planning leadership team, division directors and senior staff to finalize the department's new strategic plan. The strategic planning process and collaboration with NYCON was well-received by participants and the new plan will assist WCDH in organizational priority setting, quality improvement and ultimately preparing the department for pursuit of local health department accreditation.

2. Reflections: Successes, Challenges, and Lessons Learned

Overall, the project greatly benefited from NYCON serving as the consultant agency, with its staff of well-experienced, knowledgeable, easily approachable and responsive professionals.

In addition, implementation of the strategic planning process benefited from it being a participatory process through which division directors, senior staff, Board of Health members and frontline staff were given the opportunity to provide their feedback on WCDH's organizational mission, vision, strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats/challenges. Division directors, senior staff, Board of Health members and frontline staff were able to provide their feedback anonymously on these organizational issues through completion of comprehensive online surveys developed by NYCON in collaboration with WCDH's strategic planning team. In addition, division directors, senior staff and a Board of Health representative also had the opportunity to provide direct feedback through participation in half-day workgroup meetings and planning discussions that were expertly facilitated by NYCON consultants.

As the project was integrated into daily work activities, the primary challenge to the project was staff availability and designated time in light of the competing priorities of day-to-day departmental operations.

3. Impact and Next Steps

The strategic planning process and collaboration with NYCON was well-received by WCDH and successfully accomplished the outcome of the project with the development of a new strategic plan for the department. The new strategic plan will assist WCDH in organizational priority setting, quality improvement and ultimately preparing the department for pursuit of local health department accreditation. The next steps involved in the process will be developing and implementing specific action plans that focus on operationalizing the strategic actions and objectives identified in the plan so that concrete activities can be monitored and tracked to expand departmental quality improvement efforts.