

# 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.