

PROMISING EXAMPLES TO SUPPORT LOCAL INFECTIOUS DISEASE CAPACITY

CDC's Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity for Prevention and Control of Emerging Infectious Diseases (ELC) provides funds to support public health agencies' infectious disease programs. In early 2025, NACCHO conducted one-on-one interviews with 6 state and 11 local health departments (S/LHDs). As SHDs were required to include LHD engagement plans in their ELC funding requests, these findings highlight practical promising examples for meaningful engagement.

MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT MEANS CUSTOMIZED, CONSISTENT ACCESS

Meaningful engagement is an ongoing investment built on mutual respect, trust, and shared goals.



Consistent: Being available regularly, not just when there is a crisis



Tailored: Reflecting each LHD's capacity and community needs



Proactive: Soliciting input, not waiting for questions or issues to be brought forward



Responsive: Following through on requests and needs



Meaningful engagement is not just spending time with [LHDs] in quantity, but it's more of the quality of engagement that you offer... really understanding what their needs are or how we can be helpful."

BI-DIRECTIONAL COMMUNICATION MECHANISMS ARE CRITICAL TO SUPPORT LHDs



SHDs can establish regular communication channels with LHDs to create space for real-time dialogue and relationship building.

- Maintain standing meetings—like monthly or biweekly—tailored to different LHD audiences (e.g., communicable disease staff, agency leadership)
- Apply communication structures from other responses (e.g., COVID) to new outbreaks (e.g., Mpox)
- Partner with SACCHOs or regional networks to co-create agendas/content specific to LHD priorities



Written resources like guidance documents and fact sheets can provide references for overburdened LHDs and staff juggling multiple roles.

- Share digestible, curated updates through a recurring newsletter
- Archive slides/recordings of webinars and trainings for asynchronous access
- Organize shared drives with documents for easy access



SHDs can use communication methods to systematically solicit LHD input—not just push information—to be better aligned with local priorities.

- Use surveys, listening sessions, or needs assessments to collect LHD input on priorities, workforce gaps, or training needs
- When planning new tools or surveillance systems, engage LHDs early and often (e.g., in pilot testing or advisory groups for system updates)
- Deploy field staff (e.g., regional epidemiologists) to gather local feedback or conduct trainings



Our biggest mechanism of getting feedback from local agencies, especially smaller ones, is our field epidemiologists... Most of them live in the area they cover, and some of them have a history of working for local public health agencies, so they really get the local connection."

SHDs CAN OFFER NON-FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO LHDs TO BOLSTER CAPACITY



[The state does] a fantastic job of listening to local feedback about how to adjust the [communicable disease] system to make it more user-friendly... They've created a lot of custom reports to make it possible for non-epis to pull meaningful data."



SHDs can provide LHDs with access to subject matter experts (SMEs) to respond to questions and guide case investigations.

- Maintain contact lists of SMEs, including 24/7 contact methods
- Encourage SMEs to regularly check-in with LHDs to offer support when unusual diseases or challenging situations arise
- Offer guidance to smaller LHDs whose staff may not have disease-specific expertise



ELC funding can facilitate LHD access to surveillance systems and laboratories.

- Create a team of liaison officers to answer LHD questions, such as lab submission guidelines or specimen collection models
- Manage a statewide communicable disease reporting system



SHDs can invest in tailored data outputs to help LHDs access timely data for outbreak responses.

- Build dashboards with jurisdiction-specific data and offer downloadable de-identified extracts and custom reports
- Share small datasets directly to provide access to information that cannot be shared publicly
- Provide technical assistance or tutorials on using surveillance systems, even for non-epi staff