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.