

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.