COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

NACCHO's Local Public Health Finance Community of Practice: June 2026 Summary

In June 2026, NACCHO convened the final Local Public Health Finance Community of Practice (CoP) meeting of the project year to explore strategies for strengthening internal grants workflows, standard operating procedures (SOPs), and cross-team collaboration within local health departments (LHDs). The session focused on the systems, tools, relationships, and communication structures necessary to effectively manage grants across the full grant lifecycle.

Building on several years of Community of Practice discussions, participants explored common grants management challenges, including inconsistent workflows, fragmented tracking systems, unclear roles and responsibilities, staffing constraints, and communication gaps between finance and programmatic teams. Throughout the session, speakers emphasized that successful grants management depends on both strong systems and strong collaboration across teams.

The meeting featured an overview of NACCHO's Internal Grants Management Quick Reference Guide and Grants Management Resource Repository, both of which were developed with substantial input from Community of Practice members. Participants also heard from representatives from various Michigan LHDs, who shared lessons learned from developing Michigan's Public Health Finance and Billing Guide, a statewide initiative designed to improve knowledge sharing, workforce onboarding, mentorship, and training for public health finance and billing staff.

Additional Resource:

- Internal Grants Management Quick Reference Guide – NACCHO resource designed to help local health departments strengthen grants management systems, policies, procedures, and internal workflows.
- Grants Management Resource Repository – Collection of grants management tools, templates, and examples shared by local health departments and organized across the grants lifecycle.
- Michigan Public Health Finance Guide and Billing Guide – Resources developed by Michigan local health departments to support finance and billing staff training, onboarding, and knowledge sharing.
- Financial Strategic Planning Resource – Upcoming NACCHO resource on financial strategic planning in local health departments, scheduled for release in July 2026

Meeting Summary

- Brief introduction to workforce recruitment and retention challenges, drawing on recent research examining LHD recruitment and retention needs across the employee lifecycle (NACCHO, 2025), as well as national findings on recruitment, retention, and hiring strategies among U.S. local health departments (2025)

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- Guest research presentations on findings from the article Innovations and Hiring Improvements to Address Public Health Workforce Recruitment, exploring innovations in recruitment, hiring process improvements, workforce development strategies, and the role of civil service hiring laws. Speakers included Dr. Beth Resnick (Assistant Dean for Public Health Practice and Director, MSPH in Health Policy, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health), Paulani Mui (Assistant Practice Professor, Health Policy and Management, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health), and Dr. Valerie A. Yeager (Professor and Director, Center for Health Policy, Indiana University School of Public Health).
- Breakout discussions and Mural activities focused on workforce impacts, successful strategies, recruitment partnerships, and workarounds for salary constraints.

Breakout and Mural Discussion

Participants engaged in facilitated breakout discussions and documented their insights using a shared Mural board. Discussions explored the relationship between finance and programmatic staff, challenges associated with grants management responsibilities, strategies for strengthening collaboration, and resources needed to improve organizational effectiveness.

Across groups, participants consistently emphasized that grants management requires shared ownership and communication between finance and program staff. While many participants described strong commitment from both groups, differences in knowledge, terminology, priorities, and understanding of financial processes often create challenges that can affect grant implementation and compliance.

The following summarizes the key themes that emerged across groups and on the Mural board:

What has been your experience working with programmatic teams to manage grants?

Participants described experiences that ranged from highly collaborative partnerships to situations where communication gaps created challenges. Across groups, respondents noted that program staff often possess deep expertise in their programs but may have limited understanding of finance processes, grant requirements, or administrative constraints.

Themes that emerged:

- Program staff are often highly knowledgeable about community needs and program implementation but may have limited awareness of financial, reporting, and compliance requirements.
- Finance staff are frequently brought into grant activities late in the process rather than being engaged during planning and development.
- Differences in priorities between finance and program teams can create misunderstandings or inefficiencies.
- Staffing constraints and reduced funding have increased the number of responsibilities assigned to program staff.
- Smaller health departments often experience closer collaboration because staff work across multiple functions and roles.
- Hiring limitations, funding restrictions, and post-COVID workforce changes continue to affect grant administration capacity.
- Inconsistent processes and varying approaches to grants management remain common across departments.

What are the greatest learning curves or challenges for programmatic staff when it comes to grants management?

Participants identified grant compliance, financial terminology, budgeting requirements, and reporting expectations as major learning curves for programmatic staff. Many shared that program staff often understand program goals well but may not fully understand the financial realities, funding restrictions, and documentation requirements associated with grant management. Differences between federal, state, local, and private funding requirements can further complicate this learning process. Participants also discussed how staff turnover and onboarding challenges contribute to ongoing knowledge gaps .

Themes that emerged:

- Understanding grant rules and compliance requirements.
- Navigating differences across funding sources.
- Interpreting financial terminology and budgeting processes.
- Understanding reporting and documentation requirements.
- Loss of institutional knowledge due to staff turnover and retirements.

What practices and tools have supported you in building relationships across teams?

Participants highlighted that relationship-building often begins with communication, trust, and transparency rather than tools alone. Regular meetings between finance and program staff were frequently cited as effective strategies for keeping teams aligned. Other approaches included written SOPs, defined workflows, onboarding activities that introduce staff to finance functions, and dedicated positions that help bridge programmatic and financial roles. Participants also described the value of leadership support and creating opportunities for staff to better understand one another's responsibilities and priorities.

Successful practices included:

- Regular meetings between program staff, finance staff, and leadership.
- Establishing shared systems, tracking tools, and grant management platforms.
- Developing written SOPs and clearly documented workflows.
- Dedicated positions that serve as liaisons between finance and program teams.
- Comprehensive onboarding processes that introduce new staff to grants management and financial operations.
- Relationship-building efforts focused on trust, transparency, and communication.
- Leadership support that reinforces cross-team collaboration.
- Use of systems thinking approaches to connect operational, financial, and programmatic goals.
- Increased transparency regarding budgeting decisions, grant processes, and funding constraints.
- Opportunities for staff to learn about the work performed by other team

What kinds of resources, tools, or reference material would help you build these relationships?

Participants expressed interest in additional resources that help foster shared understanding between program and finance staff. Suggested resources included SOP templates, grant management guides, onboarding materials, change-management training, and examples of successful practices from other health departments. Participants also emphasized the value of peer-learning networks and opportunities to connect with other local health departments facing similar grants management challenges.

Resources participants would like to see include:

- Written SOPs and documented grants management procedures.
- Additional examples and tools added to NACCHO's Grants Management Resource Repository.
- Program-specific discussions and trainings on grant staffing, scopes of work, and organizational structures.
- Change management and communication training.
- Resources that help explain the financial realities behind grant-funded programs.
- Materials that help program staff understand reporting requirements, budgeting processes, and compliance expectations.
- Peer-learning opportunities and collaboration between local health departments.
- Access to examples of successful approaches used by other jurisdictions.
- Cross-county and cross-state networks for sharing lessons learned and best practices.
- Resources that help preserve institutional knowledge during staff transitions and retirements.