

12-13

## STATEMENT OF POLICY

### Local Health Department Branding

#### Policy

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) recommends local health departments adopt the business practice of branding to raise the visibility, perceived value, and reputation of their organizations. Branding communicates what the health department stands for and what it provides the community that is unique and differentiated from other agencies and organizations.<sup>1</sup> Branding can help to position the health department as a recognizable, effective, trusted leader in the community.

A strong brand helps communicate that the local health department and its services are relevant and uniquely able to meet community needs.<sup>1</sup> Brand is more than a logo. The health department's brand conveys both its identity and personality, inclusive of its culture, norms, and values. In addition to making community members aware of the existence of the health department through a common visual identity, the brand strategy is designed to foster a positive reputation and trust among community members.<sup>2</sup>

The local health department brand is formed by the organization's every communication, action, and interaction with the public and other stakeholders. If a local health department is delivering high quality services and is valued by stakeholders as the partner of choice, then the organization may have increased funding opportunities and experience fewer challenges when working with stakeholders to improve the health of the community.

The brand strategy process begins with research to learn how staff members and key external stakeholders (e.g., the public, elected officials, partner organizations) perceive the organization and to identify attributes of the local health department that are unique, important, and valued. This "discovery" process is also useful for identifying brand weaknesses that diminish the trust and credibility of a local health department. Using this research, local health departments can develop position statements, message platforms for different audiences, and a visual identity (e.g., logo, tagline).

NACCHO encourages local health departments to develop and sustain branding guidelines.

Develop branding guidelines that:

- Build local health department communications capacity by employing communications and marketing professionals or ensuring that such experts are available to the local health department.

- Follow best practices for developing and implementing an effective brand strategy. The brand strategy should align with the health department's vision, mission, and values, and communicate the value of the department's practices, products, and services to internal and external audiences. The branding strategy should align with the health department's strategic plan.
- Integrate the local health department's brand into departmental communications plans, communications channels (e.g., website, social media, listservs), written and visual communications (e.g., media releases, grant applications, annual reports, brochures, videos) and verbal communications (e.g., conversations with external audience members, presentations, speeches).
- Consider using the National Identity for Public Health Departments (i.e., the public health logo)<sup>3</sup> as a stand-alone logo or in conjunction with an organization's existing logo.

Sustain branding guidelines that:

- Recognize the essential role of public health communicators (e.g., public information officers, public health educators, media specialists, social marketers, government affairs specialists) in developing, promoting, and ensuring the integrity of the local health department brand with external and internal audiences.
- Ensure that internal stakeholders are familiar with the appropriate and consistent use of branding guidelines and the local health department logo.
- Recognize branding as a highly collaborative process in which employees at all levels should contribute to the departmental brand strategy and serve as ambassadors of the local health department in the community.
- Incorporate the local health department's brand into internal quality improvement activities, including the departmental strategic plan, voluntary accreditation, organizational development initiatives, staff member trainings, and new employee orientations.

### **Justification**

Local health departments provide essential services to the community—yet their good work often goes unnoticed and underfunded. While the public may value prevention and other public health activities, they may not connect this work with local health departments. Through branding, local health departments can better communicate why the organization exists and how it adds value.

NACCHO and the Public Health Accreditation Board endorse branding practices. State, local, and tribal health departments applying for voluntary accreditation are required to establish and implement a department-wide brand strategy.<sup>2</sup> Branding uses a common visual identity to effectively convey the health department's presence and functions and fosters a positive reputation among community members. The brand reflects the health department's mission, vision, and values.

As local health department officials position their organizations in this fast-changing environment, they must ask themselves:

1. Does my local health department consistently deliver programs and services important to community members, funders, and other key stakeholders?
2. How can my local health department position itself as a trusted community leader and agent of change on public health issues affecting the community?
3. How can my local health department become more valued by and visible to community leaders, the medical community, policymakers, funders, media professionals, and the general public?
4. Is my local health department delivering on the promises we are making to our community? Are we evaluating our programs for effectiveness and reporting those results to the community?
5. How is my local health department incorporating health equity best practices into the internal and external communications that it produces?<sup>4</sup>
6. How can my local health department rebrand to build and/or rebuild trust with stakeholders following the COVID-19 pandemic?
7. How can my local health department combat misinformation and disinformation?<sup>5</sup>

The responses to these questions—which address both the quality of a local health department and how the organization is perceived by external audiences—define a local health department’s brand and reputation.

It is important to recognize that communication and marketing staff members have an essential role in promoting and ensuring the integrity of the organization’s brand, including sharing its stories and successes. Public health communication professionals also contribute to the overall effectiveness of the organization by communicating accurate, consistent, and credible information to key audiences; designing health marketing campaigns; developing communication plans; and building communication capacity within the department. It is also important to receive and consider public feedback.

Through developing and implementing an organizational brand strategy—in concert with pursuing other quality improvement initiatives and working within recognized frameworks for local public health service delivery—local health departments can improve the quality of services, strengthen organizational culture, and better engage the community and other stakeholders.

## **References**

1. Evans, W. D., Blitstein, J., Vallone, D., Post, S., & Nielsen, W. (2015). Systematic review of health branding: growth of a promising practice. *Translational behavioral medicine*, 5(1), 24–36. Retrieved June 13, 2024, from <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13142-014-0272-1>.

2. Public Health Accreditation Board. (2022). “Measure 3.1.2 A: Organizational Branding Strategy.” Establish and implement a department-wide brand strategy. Retrieved April 26, 2024, from <https://phaboard.org/wp-content/uploads/Standards-Measures-Initial-Accreditation-Version-2022.pdf>
3. National Association of County and City Health Officials. Public Health Logo. Retrieved June 13, 2024, from <https://www.naccho.org/communications/health-department-communications/public-health-logo>.
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC's Health Equity Guiding Principles for Inclusive Communication. (2021). Retrieved June 13, 2024, from <https://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/HealthEquityGuidingPrinciples.pdf>.
5. Rodgers, Kimberly MA; Massac, Nnandi BA. Misinformation: A Threat to the Public's Health and the Public Health System. Journal of Public Health Management and Practice 26(3):p 294-296, May/June 2020. Retrieved June 13, 2024, from [https://journals.lww.com/jphmp/fulltext/2020/05000/misinformation\\_\\_a\\_threat\\_to\\_the\\_public\\_s\\_health.15.aspx](https://journals.lww.com/jphmp/fulltext/2020/05000/misinformation__a_threat_to_the_public_s_health.15.aspx)

### **Additional Reading**

1. Branding Resource Guide for Health Departments. ASTHO (2024). Retrieved June 13, 2024, from <https://www.astho.org/globalassets/resources/branding-resource-guide-for-health-departments.pdf>
2. Health Misinformation. Office of the Surgeon General, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2021). Retrieved June 13, 2024, from <https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/priorities/health-misinformation/index.html>.

### **Record of Action**

*Proposed by NACCHO Public Health Communications Committee*

*Approved by NACCHO Board of Directors July 2012*

*Updated January 2016*

*Updated June 2024*