

2012-2013 Accreditation Support Initiative (ASI) for Health Departments and Support Organizations

FINAL REPORT

1. **Community Description**

Briefly characterize the community(ies) served by your health department or support organization (location, population served, jurisdiction type, organization structure, etc). The purpose of this section is to provide context to a reader who may be unfamiliar with your agency.

St. Lawrence County, the largest county in New York State, encompasses 2,685 square miles of beautiful rural landscape, bordering the St. Lawrence River and Canada. Although Canton is the county seat, there are 4 other population centers as well. The county has 112,000 residents. St. Lawrence County boasts of 4 colleges and universities, and 5 hospitals, but despite the facilities available within the county, we face many challenges. . Unemployment hovers in the double digits. Lack of public transportation resources makes traveling the county difficult. Reaching medical care and resources for much of the population is difficult. St. Lawrence County ranks 57th out of 62 NYS counties on the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation NYS county health ranking for 2013. The St. Lawrence County Public Health Department (SLCPHD) is a partial service department reaching out to all areas of the county. Low socioeconomic status prohibits regular access to health care, leading to high levels of infectious and chronic disease. The county budget is unstable, and all departments are facing cuts in services and personnel. The Public Health Department (PHD) has lost programs that are not mandated by the state, such as home health care, and in the past 18 months has lost half the PHD workforce. We are reorganizing and rethinking strategies, so the timing for development of a strategic plan was good. Although there is much sadness over lost programs, clients and friends, we expect that a strategic plan will help us turn the department in a more positive direction.

2. **Work Plan Overview**

Provide an overview of the work you conducted with or because of this funding, including the significant accomplishments/deliverables completed between December 2012-May 2013 under the auspices of this grant, and the key activities you engaged in to achieve these accomplishments. This should result in a narrative summary of the chart you completed in Part 1, in a format that is easily understandable by others.

Receiving grant funding in order to contract for strategic plan facilitation has been crucial in our preparation for accreditation. Given the lack of available funding within St. Lawrence County to seek such contracted services, and the reduction of staff resulting in increased work loads, made adding one more major project such as a the development of a strategic plan untenable. Being able to contract for professional facilitation of that service has made all the difference.

We were able to gather a diversified team of respected individuals to work on the drafts of the plan. All along the way we took the work to the total staff of PH for feedback and modification. The Board of Health was apprised of the project and progress, and a representative participated, adding depth and scope to the ideas, aspirations and activities suggested as the plan progressed.

3. **Challenges**

*Describe any challenges or barriers encountered during the implementation of your work plan. These can be challenges you may have anticipated at the start of the initiative or unexpected challenges that emerged during the course of implementing your proposed activities. If challenges were noted in your interim report, please **do** include them here as well.*

The short timeframe from beginning to end of the grant period was limiting in that we were not able to reach out to community stake holders for much feedback and interaction. We would have valued information that forums or surveys could have brought us, but our agenda was limited to using feedback that we could gather in-house. We were joined for one work session by a member of the Board of Health which was invaluable. He was encouraging and motivating, and committed to supporting us in future endeavors such as presenting the Strategic Plan to the Board of Legislators and the community.

4. **Facilitators of Success**

Describe factors or strategies that helped to facilitate completion of your work. These can be conditions at your organization that generally contributed to your successes or specific actions you took that helped make your project successful or mitigated challenges described above.

The program leaders that populated the Strategic Planning team have been committed to seeing this project to completion. They understand the importance of accreditation and know that Strategic Planning is a prerequisite. These leaders also recognize the precarious position that our PHD is in at this time, having lost funding and personnel, so that efficient reorganization is imperative if we are to continue to offer timely and effective services to our consumers. Choosing the right contracted facilitator was also crucial to our success. In researching contract specialists we evaluated location, availability, flexibility and past experience. We chose a local agency who knows the area and county issues and an individual with much experience in facilitation of strategic plan development and similar projects. He used exactly the right mix of allowing us to run with an idea and keeping us on track. His editorial and guidance abilities lead us to success.

5. **Lessons Learned**

Please describe your overall lessons learned from participating in the Accreditation Support Initiative. These can be things you might do differently if you could repeat the process and/or the kinds of advice you might give to other health departments or support organizations who are pursuing similar accreditation-related funding opportunities or technical assistance activities.

With the downsizing of our workforce combined with the multiplying or changing of duties, many of our employees remain discouraged and a little overwhelmed. Some have hinted at dismissal of the Strategic Plan as just one more thing to read and stick on a shelf, instead of a working document. It was thought that the program leaders would be able to make the time to work on the plan, thereby freeing employees to take care of regular PHD business. I wonder if including people from all levels of the organization on the team might have been more productive. It might have precluded some of the “us vs. them” thought process. In selecting members for the Accreditation Team, we will include individuals from all levels of the organization.

6. **Funding Impact**

Describe the impact that this funding has had on your health department/support organization (and/or health departments you worked with as a support organization). In other words, thinking about the work you have done over the last six months:

- *(Health departments) How has this funding advanced your own accreditation readiness or quality improvement efforts?*
- *(Support organizations) How has this funding advanced the technical assistance you provide to health departments? How has this funding advanced the accreditation readiness of the health departments you worked with?*

While we have had the Community Health Assessment and the Community Health Improvement Plan in process for nearly a year, we had not yet undertaken the Strategic Planning Process. This funding has made that possible via engaging the services of a skilled contract agent. Having been awarded this grant has also lead to other funded training opportunities that are furthering our journey toward accreditation. These training opportunities have been *invaluable* in the information imparted and the contacts made of other LDHs that are on the same road.

7. **Next Steps**

What are your organization's (and/or the health departments you worked with as a support organization) general plans for the next 12-24 months in terms of accreditation preparation and quality improvement?

We have appointed an Accreditation Coordinator but have yet to establish a team. This will be accomplished within the next several months. The team will be looking at the standards and measures and will divide the areas so that experts or program leaders will have responsibility for overseeing the most appropriate areas. An electronic repository for required documentation will be established so that key personnel can deposit documents, in preparation for eventual sorting. Education of all PHD staff will take place at various times in the process in order to engage them in the process and to update them as to progress and department need. We will be attending all training offered and funded to learn as much as possible about the Accreditation Process. And we will be seeking independent funding to be able to accomplish all the requirements of Accreditation, as well as the application itself.