

### **Domain 3: Barriers to Leader Development and Scholar Recommendations and Comments on SEPHLI**

This section presents graduates' explanations for why the program may have influenced their leadership to a small degree, or not at all.

#### **Summary of Findings**

Although the majority of graduates indicated that SEPHLI had developed their leadership skills moderately or to a large degree, some responded that the program had a less significant influence. When asked to rate SEPHLI's long-term influence on their leadership, 18% of respondents (n=31) chose "small" and 3% (n=6) chose "no influence."

Respondents who indicated that SEPHLI had a "small" or "no influence" on their leadership were asked to explain some of the factors that limited the influence of SEPHLI. Reasons cited:

- 41% (n=15) of graduates who said the program had a small or no influence on their leadership cited scholar characteristics: several were nearing retirement, so that they did not have time to put into practice what they had learned, while several others were already very experienced and well-trained in leadership before the program and so did not find the experience to yield much benefit
- 10% (n=4) cited aspects of the SEPHLI program: either perceived shortcomings of the curriculum or of alumni activities
- 8% (n=3) cited the nature of their jobs, such as lack of time to engage in SEPHLI learning activities or to contact peers after graduation, not being in a supervisory position, or perceived lack of authority to make changes
- 4% (n=2) cited aspects of their organization, such as frequent changes of administration, resistance to change

In other areas of the survey, scholars made recommendations for SEPHLI including recommendations to enroll scholars earlier enough in their career to benefit and help the field long-term, refine the curriculum, and expand alumni activities. Scholars also made many general and specific positive comments about diverse aspects of the SEPHLI program.

**Question 3.1 If graduates responded that SEPHLI had “no influence” or only a “small influence,” what factors limited SEPHLI’s influence?**

As noted in Domain 1, the survey asked graduates: "Overall, how much long-term influence did SEPHLI have on your leadership?" Scholars were presented with the options: "No influence," "Small long-term influence," "Moderate long-term influence," and "Large long-term influence." In response, 31 respondents (18%) chose “small” while 6 respondents (3%) chose “no influence.”

Those who chose “small” or “no influence” were asked to “explain some of the factors that limited the influence of SEPHLI. These factors could relate to the program itself or to other factors.” This question was asked to solicit input for program improvement and to help the program staff understand the environment in which scholars are applying their training.

Respondents described four overarching categories of barriers to development (Table 5): characteristics of the scholar, the program, their position, and their organization. The following sections describe these barriers.

**Table 5: Barriers to Leadership Development for SEPHLI Graduates (n=27<sup>a</sup>)**

Type of Barrier	n	% of respondents
Scholar - near retirement, or already experienced and well-trained	11	41
Program - limitations of SEPHLI program curriculum or alumni activities	10	37
Position - characteristics of the respondent’s job, such as lack of time to engage in learning, non-supervisory position or authority to make changes	8	30
Organization - characteristics of the work environment	4	15

<sup>a</sup>Twenty-seven respondents provided usable comments explaining barriers. Some respondents provided more than one barrier; therefore, these percentages total greater than 100.

**Scholar Characteristics**

Several respondents indicated that they were too close to retirement when they completed the program, resulting in a small return on the investment.

*I was close to retiring when I went through the program.*

*At the time of my participation I was already very close to retirement and over 60 years old. I had been in leadership positions for over 20 years and looking forward to retirement. I believe that SEPHLI should only take Public Health leaders who are not yet 50 years of age and who have a minimum of 10 years before retirement so that they can use and incorporate many of the principles leaned there.*

*I am near the end of my career and have been in leadership for many years.*

Five respondents explained that SEPHLI's impact on them was limited because they already had extensive past leadership training and experience:

*I had already been through an in-state leadership program. While SEPHLI enhanced my skills to a degree, I feel that when I began SEPHLI I already had a strong skill set.*

*Previous experiences provided very substantial development opportunities; perhaps honed by SEPHLI.*

*Leadership skills were developed well before SEPHLI and leadership programs I've benefited from far exceeded anything offered by SEPHLI.*

*Some of the things I answered 'not at all' to are simply because I had already made those [leadership] commitments prior to [attending SEPHLI] and they were not influenced by SEPHLI though, had I not, they might have been.*

*Prior to attending SEPHLI, I had graduate level training in public health, and had worked in local and state public health positions that pushed, challenged, and strengthened my leadership skills.*

Two others stated that since leadership is learned throughout life, a single training program did not have a large net influence:

*SEPHLI was a great experience; however, SEPHLI is only a small portion of life-long learning and leadership development.*

*I think leadership is a life-long learning process.*

One respondent had graduated too recently to be able to gauge SEPHLI's influence:

*Small long term effect because just graduated December 2007.*

## **Program**

Ten respondents to this question cited factors directly related to the SEPHLI program as constraining their leadership development. Four noted that the topic of leadership was ancillary to the other curriculum topics that were taught in the years that they attended, or that the curriculum was not meeting the scholar's needs based on career level:

*The face-to-face program that year spent too much time on subjects related to preparedness such as vector borne diseases etc. That is stuff that was quickly forgotten. The most memorable part of the program was the individual assessments.*

*Leadership was not a focus when I attended. The entire program was directed toward the new Emergency Preparedness funding. Focus was regarding how to prepare, etc. There were some excellent ideas; however, the focus was very limiting.*

*While the basic concepts of public health leadership remain constant and provide a strong foundation for partnering for positive change within the public health system, public health focus, partners, and community perspective and attitudes changed after 9/11/01.*

*I felt as if the SEPHLI program was eyewash and lacked substance.*

*The program was geared more to leaders 'to be' or emerging leaders it seems, not those who had been actively engaged in various leadership activities for some time so its utility was not as impactful.*

Graduates who reported minimal leadership development related to program activities attribute it to a lack of participation during the time period between the required onsite meetings (phases 2 & 4) and some expressed a desire for additional alumni activities after the program is over:

*Perhaps some required online classes would have enhanced the overall experience.*

*The direct face-to-face time (onsite training) was the best part of the course, but it was inadequate in length. Perhaps some required online courses (e.g., via Blackboard) would have enhanced the overall experience. I don't think there was enough participation during the time periods between the required onsite meetings.*

*I believe SEPHLI could be more successful if it required more from-the-office contact among participants- perhaps to discuss assigned articles...and if we were required to stay involved with our cohort for two years post-graduation, for example, by helping to choose participants from our state.*

*Lack of continuity following completion of Fellowship.*

Not all of the scheduled activities produced leadership skills, as one graduate notes:

*I didn't have a strong connection to our work group--and so really had little buy-in to the group project.*

## **Position**

More than one-quarter (30%) indicated that factors related to their job position limited SEPHLI's influence on their development. Three did not have enough time during the program to work on leadership materials or projects, due to their workload:

*At the time I participated in the program, my workload was such that I am sure I did not get the most out of the program.*

*The experience overall was good, but it was difficult to put best effort into the project due to demands of routine responsibilities.*

*I did not take advantage of all of the offerings and I am sure some good stuff in the conference calls. Lack of time due to other leadership commitments drove this.*

One cited a lack of time after the program to keep in touch with peers:

*Lack of time to stay in touch and use the network.*

Others were not in leadership positions, and did not have the opportunity to use their leadership training:

*I am not in a position where I supervise others, and have, at this time, no potential for that unless I move to a local health department administrative position.*

*SEPHLI provided some new theories/approaches, but I have not had many occasions to employ some of what I learned into my current position because...there simply wasn't the opportunity.*

*Having no authority over any aspect of my job may have limited my progress.*

One relayed the challenge of practicing skills learned in the program in the work environment:

*It's always hard to put into practice ideas and strategies once you are away from the teaching environment holding one accountable for using these new tools. While SEPHLI tries to include past participants in continuing education opportunities, once the class is over, I'm afraid many of us return to mostly doing things the way we've always done them, although I hope this isn't so.*

## Organization

Finally, three respondents expressed frustration with barriers to change within their work environments:

*The organization I was in at the time had its own problems such as frequent change of administration and was not progressive enough to utilize the skills I learned from SEPHLI.*

*SEPHLI is a great program that gets you prepared and "pumped up." Then you come home and realize that the State has no intention of changing.*

*Some of the best leadership skills cannot help one penetrate the barriers that exist while working with some personalities.*

Another cited a lack of applicability based on working in a university:

*While I work with local and state health departments, I am employed by a university rather than a health department, which may have influenced the usefulness for me.*

The next section deals with general scholar recommendations about SEPHLI.

## **Section 3.2 Scholar Recommendations about SEPHLI**

In response to the open-ended questions on the survey, several scholars made recommendations about the future of SEPHLI. This section presents their recommendations in several general categories.

### **General Recommendations to Continue Offering the Program**

*I believe that all folks who work in Public Health in a leadership capacity should go through the Leadership Institute. It was a very important way to learn and grow in Public Health.*

*Please expand [SEPHLI] and continue so that others will also benefit. Time and money and dedication well spent.*

### **Target Audience**

Three respondents recommended that SEPHLI enroll younger leaders with many years left to serve the field:

*It is a good program but needs to select more young professionals with leadership potential on the way up rather than established people with few years left of service.*

*It is a good program for young and upcoming professionals. No one over 55 should be enrolled.*

*Many participants in my class (and in the class right after mine) were at the end of their Public Health Careers- many had been in public health for 30 years or were in their mid-late 50's or early 60's. It would be much more "long-serving" if participation was geared to those with at least 10-15 more years to serve in public health.*

### **Curriculum**

Others provided suggestions on how to refine the curriculum:

*[SEPHLI] needs to address or focus more on managing change and explore any studies done if not discuss the issue of medical doctors as administrators of public health organizations then business-educated individuals.*

*Should either be broader in the overall Public Health focus or have years that are dedicated to a specific topic.*

*The program should have stated and measurable objectives related to each of its main objectives.*

One respondent suggested strengthening the program's requirements:

*I believe the entire course could be enhanced by increasing the requirements and adding more online content.*

## **Marketing**

One person commented on the need to promote the SEPHLI program through improved marketing strategies:

*Market yourselves to the state leadership! Leadership needs a better understanding of what a great accomplishment SEPHLI really means.*

## **Alumni Activities**

Several scholars recommended enhanced alumni activities:

*I wish more were offered for alumni. I check out the site but never really see anything. I truly enjoyed the experience and wish I could reconnect with my other "classmates" and continue to participate in SEPHLI discussions.*

*Could you have an "advanced" institute for SEPHLI graduates?*

*You need to do an annual event inviting all back and have a GREAT speaker.*

*I would like to participate in ongoing leadership development activities that build upon SEPHLI experience. I receive limited information from the program since graduating.*

*I enjoyed SEPHLI, wonder with the price of fuel etc. if you might have to do some distant learning etc. in the future.*

## **Section 3.3 Additional learner reactions to SEPHLI**

In response to a closed-ended question on the survey, about 95% of respondents answered that they had recommended the program to other public health professionals, while 3% had not and 2% were not sure.

At the end of the survey, scholars were asked to make any additional comments that they wished to make. Many of these comments were related to leader or network development or recommendations, and have been worked into the report above. Other comments are presented below.

### General Positive Comments about SEPHLI

In response to an open-ended question at the end of the survey asking if there was anything else the graduate wanted to add, 24 graduates offered positive comments about SEPHLI in general or about specific aspects of SEPHLI. By contrast, very few comments in the entire set of survey responses to all questions presented an overall negative view on SEPHLI. Among the more general comments were comments such as:

*Critical - a must have program.*

*Great well-rounded program!*

*I think it is an excellent program and I would recommend it to anyone in public health.*

*It's the BEST! Leaders training leaders to be better leaders of future leaders. I wish more would participate. The more you put into it, the more you'll get out of it. I'm very glad I had the opportunity to be a scholar.*

*SEPHLI provided me with the best opportunity to develop myself as a leader since I entered the field of public health.*

*It was a great learning experience and great fun.*

*It was a great experience, and I'm glad that it is a resource available to state public health employees. There are not a lot of benefits (pay), but I consider SEPHLI to be a benefit that I can provide to employees.*

*The training was excellent and impacted my personal, as well as professional life.*

*I really enjoyed SEPHLI and feel that it greatly enhanced my work in public health and my ability to provide a leadership role from any position in an organization.*

A senior official who has observed the program for some time in West Virginia observed:

*SEPHLI has grown more than 75 leaders within the West Virginia Bureau for Public Health and our Local Health Departments.*

## More Specific Positive Comments about SEPHLI

Another feature of the program that solicited positive feedback from scholars was the curriculum, also referred to as the course content. Comments categorized as content-focused spoke to program topics and design:

*A great course; clearly designed for public health leaders to improve their knowledge, skill and abilities.*

*SEPHLI provided the basic personal development opportunities that public health staff so desperately need but usually cannot afford.*

*SEPHLI is a great learning tool, the risk communications and 360 feedback can be valuable tools if raters objectively rate your leadership qualities.*

*SEPHLI has developed a unique program that I would recommend to anyone in a leadership/potential leadership role. The program was able to provide individual growth to all participants despite diversity of professions. The tools I learned/developed from SEPHLI are something that I use every day. It has allowed me to understand the process of leadership and given me the opportunity to continue to have an impact both in the community and in my staff. SEPHLI laid a solid foundation for building the skills and gave me the tools to continue the process.*

*The focus on leadership development, program, organizational and dealing with media was excellent.*

*Enjoyed UNC environment; it was a pleasure to get to know [then program director] Donna Dinkin.*

*The “leaders” who were introduced to us remain forever as role models in Public Health and the one I remember and cherish was Dr. David Satcher who was Surgeon General nominee and shortly thereafter placed into the position. His focus on HIV/AIDS...is an area of profound continuing interest now due to increases in heterosexual transmission from “down-low” males which he spoke to back then.*

There were a handful of comments that were more reflective and insightful, than either appreciative or critical. These comments tended to be more general and therefore were categorized as one group.

*The SEPHLI experience has had a delayed influence on me. I think it has taken me to get back in the groove of work after graduation to reflect on everything that I learned.*

*In my 12 years working in public health, I have learned that most administrators really need to attend SEPHLI, but few ever do. I think our public health workforce would be better-served if we had better people in leadership positions.*

*Good program but we haven't had any funds to support others in the program in recent years nor do we see any in the near future.*

*I wish public health professionals could gain more competitive salary compensation for their leadership responsibilities.*

The next section deals with the viewpoints and recommendations of senior SEPHLI stakeholders in states that support the program.