

Southeast Public Health Leadership Institute Leadership Project Proposal

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Project Title: Workforce Development Model: A Comprehensive Strategy for Workforce Development for Environmental Public Health Professionals in South Carolina.

Abstract

The purpose of this project is to develop a strategy for building a Workforce Development Model for Environmental Public Health professionals in South Carolina. The model will provide the necessary guidance for competency and skill building opportunities at each classification level and provide direction for career advancement. Developing the “strategy” for building a Workforce Development Model (WDM) is considered to be an essential first step.

The outcome of this model is to provide a system to assure 1) professional development, 2) a competent workforce, and 3) a defined career path by December 31, 2005. To accomplish this, the group divided tasks into small workgroups.

The project proposal was approved after discussion with the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) members and the Director of the Bureau of Environmental Health (DBEH). Workforce Development is an essential component in achieving the agency’s mission; therefore, this project has agency value and will produce optimal outcomes. The project team met several times over the year and subgroups were established to complete identified tasks and communicate on a regular basis. The subgroup identified keys areas to research which included 1) recruitment and retention 2) training/CE requirements 3) promotional practices 4) present and future staffing needs.

This research yielded valuable data and information to support the practice of Environmental Health and strengthen existing policies and procedures to assure a competent public health workforce. This project generated numerous leadership development opportunities that include creating a shared vision, enhanced communication, and system thinking. Workforce Development is the most essential element in our collective efforts in assuring the public’s health.

Introduction/ Background

Limited growth has occurred over the past decade for Environmental Health programs. Services are impacted by increased demand and limited staff capacity to fulfill its requirements in the following areas:

- ❑ Foodservice facility inspections have increased from about 11,000 to over 16,000.
- ❑ Septic system permit application has ranged from a low of 16,000 to over 29,000 annually.
- ❑ General sanitation activities, especially rabies, lead and child daycare facility inspections, has increased dramatically.

Several years of budget cuts have made a monetary rewards system virtually non-existent. State salaries are not competitive which diminishes the ability to recruit and retain quality employees. The routine implementation of regulations is often challenged in the courts. Staff often has limited skills in adapting to the advancement in technology. The net result of these occurrences

have affected the ability to respond to growing service demands, an over-stressed workforce and low employee morale.

Assuring a flexible, adaptive, and highly skilled workforce has never been more important than it is today. Workforce is the most essential element in our collective efforts in assuring the public health. The Environmental Health profession has reached a critical point. The profession must address its ability to meet the service demands. A comprehensive Workforce Development Model is an essential step in meeting service demands. A statewide staffing model, which identifies career paths have not been developed for Environmental Public Health professionals. For many years, Environmental Public Health Managers have expressed the need for a workforce development model to address our long term staffing need. This career path provides the employee the option to plan their future and outlines training, experiences and competencies needed for career advancement.

Many contributing factors impact this situation including a lack of vision or the right motivation. Whatever the reason, it is important to address this task at this time. Intellectual capital and its transportability is the employment model for the foreseeable future. This means a more mobile workforce. Employees entering the workforce today can anticipate several careers in their lifetime. In addition, employees are demanding more control of their careers. Organizations not meeting employee goals for career control can expect to lose talent to organizations that meet this need. Employees must to know what skills and competencies it takes to their job and what they need to advance the career ladder. Managers need the best skilled employees that they can have to meet ever-increasing challenges. State organizations not meeting stakeholder needs can expect to be re-organized, re-structured, right-sized, down sized, privatized or whatever state legislatures feel are appropriate to meet stakeholder needs and concerns. Whatever the challenges of the future, we are certain that the organization that has a flexible, adaptive, and a highly skilled workforce will be better positioned to meet them. Because of these, and many other variables affecting the employee/ employer/ stakeholder relationship, the past approach to workforce development can no longer be allowed to continue. One tool to accomplish this goal is the utilization of this WDM.

Project Description

The purpose of this project is to develop a strategy for building a Workforce Development Model for Environmental Public Health professionals in South Carolina. The development of a comprehensive Workforce Development Model is an enormous undertaking. We believe that the sheer enormity of this undertaking is the primary reason why it has never been accomplished. By laying out a step-by-step strategy, we hope to provide the framework for promoting the division of this enormous task into manageable sub-units or tasks that can be completed independently by small workgroups. When complete, our strategy will be both task and time oriented. That is, the strategy will provide guidance for the completion of specific tasks within selected time periods. Since many of the tasks can be completed independently of each other, relatively small amounts of resources will be required for the completion of each task. The completion of each task will be an easily measurable objective. Some tasks can be accomplished simultaneously, allowing for different work groups on them. Others will be needed to build subsequent tasks. We estimate that once the directing strategy (our project) is complete it will take two years to complete the model.

Objectives

The following objectives were outlined for our project:

- Documented support from the Director of the Bureau of Environmental Health to proceed with this project and for the creation of a problem solving team.

Measurement Tool: Verbal commitment from the DBEH to pursue this project.

- ❑ Bring together a diverse team of stakeholders willing to commit the time, energy and effort necessary to develop this Workforce Development Strategy.

Measurement Tool: A problem solving team with appropriate stakeholder representation will be convened.

- ❑ Organizational meeting of the problem solving team.

Measurement Tool: Meeting held with a commitment made for future meetings.

- ❑ Define the project scope, assign tasks and plan for future meetings.

Measurement Tool: Documentation (notes from meetings) of the discussion of these topics.

- ❑ Create a clear and guiding vision for a comprehensive strategy for a Workforce Development Model for Environmental Health and build a consensus among project team for its development.

Measurement Tool: The strategy for the Workforce Development Model will be developed.

- ❑ Complete strategy for workforce development.

Measurement Tool: Present the strategy for development of the model to the DBEH.

Methodology

This project used a collaborative process to form a multidisciplinary team to develop a Workforce Development Model. Using a “systems” approach the team analyzed the conditions that have precipitated the current system, cost/benefits of changing or not changing and created a shared vision of where we wanted to go.

After reaching consensus on the parameters of the project, subgroups were established task assigned and regular communication schedule was agreed upon. Tasks included the review of numerous internal documents, policies and procedures along with research on how other organizations have approached this issue. The subgroups identified key areas to research to included recruitment and retention, training, promotional practices and present and future staff needs.

Results

Building a “strong container for change” particularly for such an enormous undertaking is indeed a significant leadership challenge. Overall Purpose: To assess the system and information collection, analysis and dissemination processes regarding Workforce Development. Results should:

- ❑ Measure and improve staff workforce development opportunities
- ❑ Discover staff attitudes about learning issues affecting the work environment, quality, and productivity
- ❑ Provide data for long-range planning
- ❑ Evaluate effectiveness
- ❑ Discover opportunities for improvement

It was clear from the beginning that this project would require an extensive commitment to have a complete project at this time. However, substantial progress has been made. To date we have accomplished the following:

1. Conducted a meeting with Mr. Roger Scott, Director of the Bureau of Environmental Health.
2. Discussed with and obtained verbal support from other senior agency stakeholders.
3. Conducted three-project team meetings.
4. Conducted three regional sub-team meetings.
5. Researched and discussed existing state and agency personnel policies.
6. Researched and discussed existing state, regional and local Environmental Health recruiting, selection, training, development and promotional practices.
7. Researched and discussed present and future staffing needs. This included both the quantity and the make-up of future staff.
8. Discussed and outlined the benefits of a WDM versus not having one.
9. Discussed and outlined potential career paths (technical, managerial, combination)
10. Researched and discussed skills and competencies associated with Environmental Health positions.
11. Reviewed and are continuing to update an entry-level basic training guide for Environmental Health staff.
12. Discussed and outlined next steps for continuing this project.
13. Briefed stakeholders at statewide meetings on two different occasions.

With respect to the identified objectives, all have been completed with the exception of the final objective. The final step in completing the strategy for workforce development is compiling all the information collected into a single document which will be accomplished during the first quarter of 2006.

Conclusion

One of the greatest challenges facing Environmental Public Health agencies today is assuring a qualified competent workforce is available to carry out its activities. Having a qualified workforce doesn't just happen it takes planning. Planning for a qualified workforce begins long before you "post" that vacancy and doesn't end with the new employee orientation. The journey that we face in addressing workforce development is no doubt a long one, but each journey begins with that first step. The strategy that we plan to provide will guide us through subsequent steps in building a complete Workforce Development Model.

Leadership Development Opportunities

Environmental Public Health in South Carolina, like many other Public Health organizations across the nation, has faced enormous challenges for several years. Our budget has been cut each of the past three years. There has been no increase in overall staffing in many districts for over twenty years. In fact, several positions have been lost. Demands for services increase each year. Salaries are not competitive which diminish the ability to recruit and retain skilled employees. The routine implementation of regulations is often challenged in the courts. Employees often have limited skills in adapting to the advancement in technology. A comprehensive workforce Development Model is an essential step to address this concern. Across the state, there is no uniformity in workforce development for Environmentalist. Environmentalist Health professionals may be assigned to the same program, have the same job title, and responsibilities with varying competencies and skill levels in varying pay grades.

How will a Workforce Development Model solve these problems? The answer is that it may not solve all of the problems, but it will help in many areas. A well trained, more highly skilled workforce will be more flexible, more adaptable and generally better equipped to handle the complex work environment faced by today's Environmental Public Health professionals. A Workforce Development Model can provide employees with more control over their career advancements.

Working on developing this strategy has for developing a Workforce Development Model provided the following leadership opportunities and challenges.

Working as a Team

This project required more time, energy, effort and expertise than the two of us could provide. To that end, the decision to bring together a diverse group of stakeholders to produce a broader range of ideas and promote broader acceptance of the strategy was necessary. The first leadership challenge was finding a group willing to commit the time and effort to this project. Having worked in the Environmental Health profession for many years, individuals considered to be innovative, visionary, with problem solving skills, and the willingness to change the status quo were selected to participate on this project.

During the team meetings the leadership role was shared in leading the discussion and keeping the group focused, coordinating scheduled meetings, developing agenda and assigning task for the team members. This opportunity took on special significance. Having worked on effective teams neither of us had approached team participation from a predominately leaning perspective. Focusing on team participation in this manner made it more aware of the team's dynamics in dealing with Conservers, Pragmatists and Originators. The three styles displayed distinct differences and preferences when approaching change. Understanding these personal and interpersonal dynamics provided the insight to respond to the need and style of others to enhanced collaboration and synergy among the group.

Creating a Shared Vision

The team members came together to determine the focus, purpose and common direction for the all individuals with a vested interest in improving workforce development opportunities for Environmental Health. In recent years, much of the state's attention has been on re-defining the appropriate roles and functions of its public health staff to meet the changing needs of its communities. By using the shared vision philosophy the team and its key partners can implement a broad-based environmental health planning process that allowed us to use data effectively and actively engage our staff and communities to build local workforce capacity.

To accomplish this we engaged everyone in the process to create a shared vision of what workforce development for Environmental Health should look like in South Carolina. This approach was also considered best since none of the team member exercised any formal authority over the other team members. The co-leaders facilitated the creation of our shared vision by promoting open discussion and sharing of ideas. Participation was encouraged by all members of the project team, and in the case of our team was pretty easily obtained. There was initially a lot of "brainstorming" and recording of ideas. Everything was posted for the team to see and review. There was a lot of energy surrounding this activity and it was obvious that the team was excited about this project.

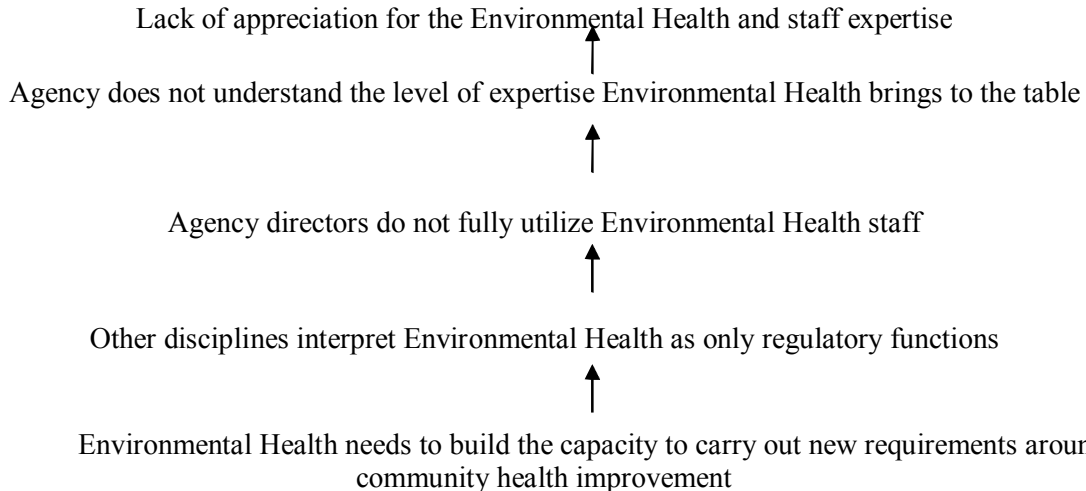
As the progress continued, we began to focus in on what we wanted to accomplish as a group. While not everyone (including the co-leaders) agreed on every detail, it was obvious that the process had brought us together. The conclusion of this process was a vision in which the entire problem solving team had "ownership." To maintain on-going ownership, we will: 1) focus on our direction and purpose for environmental health workforce development activities, 2) continue to alert stakeholders to needed changes and 3) promote interest and commitment at the state and local levels.

Applying Systems Thinking

The approach of systems thinking is fundamentally different from traditional forms of analysis. Systems thinking focuses on how something interacts with other constituents of the system. The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook was used to shape the systems thinking process and provide tools and techniques to analyze the current system and the variables that surround that system. A set of “guiding questions” provided in our resources helped us through this analysis. The results of this analysis are included as Appendix 1.

In order to fully see the “big picture” the team also informally surveyed staff and managers to determine what the key systems issues are currently impacting environmental health. The team must understand the interrelationships that shape the behavior of the system. What are the barriers to workforce development?

Ladder of Inference: Past workforce development inactivity decreased the visibility of environmental health and inadvertently decreased discipline value in the Agency. Today, Environmental Health is not fully utilized to provide expertise in the decision-making process or the implementation of statewide strategic planning, assessment and evaluation activities.



The systems thinking approach will allow us to create a Workforce Development Plan promoting the development of Environmental Health and core Public Health competencies during all stages of an Environmental Health career path within the agency.

- ❑ Assess training needs of Environmental Health staff
- ❑ Identify tools and resources to enhance Environmental Health and core Public Health competencies
- ❑ Identify opportunities for recognition
- ❑ Develop recommendations for recruitment and retention

Systems thinking techniques provided value and enhanced our understanding of the current system. There is obviously a lot more involved in the field of systems thinking than we have explored. It is further apparent to us that the application of the tools of systems thinking requires some practice and experience to be productive. The team plans to utilize The Dance of Change (The Challenges to Sustaining Momentum in Learning Organizations) and The Path of Least Resistance for Managers Handbooks to sustain the process and explore the development of an Environmental Health state-level workforce development committee to carryout the framework established by this team.