

Seeking Accreditation in a Small County

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Objectives

- Describe characteristics common in small counties that affect implementation of the accreditation process
- Describe one approach to accreditation for small counties

Importance of Accreditation

- Improvement of public health competencies and practice
- Accountability
- Credibility
- Evidence of the importance of Public Health function in the view of the broader world
- Financial implications in the future?

NACCHO's Process

1. Appoint an Accreditation Coordinator and a department-wide team
2. Review PHAB's online orientation
3. Review documentation requirements
4. Work on the prerequisites and do:
 - a) Community Health Assessment
 - b) Community Health Improvement Plan
 - c) Department Strategic Plan
5. Prepare the documentation for accreditation

About Smaller Counties . . .

Strengths

- People often know personally their internal and external partners
- Often only a few people or organizations may present in a community or county as representative stakeholders
- Opportunity for creativity and resourcefulness to adapt programs to local needs
- Rural communities commonly have a strong traditional value of “neighborliness” – coming together to meet threats and help others in time of trouble



Weaknesses

- People may not get along with their community partners and there may not be alternatives to work with
- Difficulty finding, hiring, and retaining qualified people
- Frequently a single person is responsible for a program; if he/she leaves, institutional knowledge is lost
- May be insufficient resources to adequately staff public health programs
- Grant contract structure delays implementation and increases costs for small jurisdictions

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Opportunities

- Some grant programs provide capacity building that can be leveraged to strengthen the LHD and meet accreditation standards
- The public health accreditation program may assist in informing local decision-makers and gaining their support for improvement of local public health and increasing accountability
- If you can engage the interest and support of the relatively few leaders of a small community, you can accomplish almost anything.



Threats

- Loss of trained, experienced staff to local budget restraints, retirement and moves to jobs with more attractive pay/benefits/advancement
- If accreditation is not attained, the possibility of reduction in access to grants and other resources for the local health department

Some Strategies

- Lay groundwork with decision-makers and community partners; align accreditation with local concerns and priorities
- Review programs and structures already in place that may meet, or could meet with some modifications, accreditation standards and measures
- In planning and implementation of changes or new programs or grants, incorporate the necessary elements to meet accreditation standards



A Small County Process for Accreditation

1. The PH Director, Health Officer and/or Director of Nursing studies what is required; terms are defined in local perspectives as feasible; staff involved as available.
2. Programs, grants and structures already in place are reviewed and adapted as feasible
3. Community partners and decision-makers are recruited and support for accreditation is nurtured.
4. As opportunities and resources can be developed, do:
 - a) Community Health Assessment
 - b) Community Health Improvement Plan
 - c) Department Strategic Plan
5. When enough pieces are coming together, then make a case to the BOS for the funds to apply for accreditation

Summary

- Accreditation is an important tool to improve public health practice and the health of the communities served
- LHDs in small counties have some unique challenges and opportunities in achieving accreditation
- There is great opportunity for creativity and innovation for small county LHDs as they prepare for accreditation

