

Leadership Training Through The National Association of County and City Health Officials' Health and Disability Fellowship Program

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Background

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) promotes the **inclusion and engagement** of people with disabilities in planning, implementing, and evaluating public health programs, products, and services to 2,800 local health departments (LHDs) by:

- Informing and educating LHDs about health and disability resources;
- Supporting a peer assistance network; and
- Developing and sharing model practices related to health promotion and emergency preparedness planning.

NACCHO's Health and Disability Fellowship Program provides graduate students and recent graduates with real-world, applied workforce development training in the field of health and disability. Fellows:

- Work 15-20 hours per week either on-site or remotely;
- Receive a stipend and funding to attend at least one conference;
- Are mentored by NACCHO's Health and Disability staff; and
- Work on discrete project deliverables, as well as other projects of interest related to disability.

Fellowship Activities

Fellows gain experience:

- Developing tools and resources for LHDs;
- Providing technical assistance to LHDs;
- Maintaining NACCHO's Health and Disability Toolkit;
- Participating in Health and Disability workgroup meetings;
- Writing blog posts and articles for NACCHO's website;
- Developing inclusive disability policy statements; and
- Attending public health conferences and presenting on webinars.

Fellows

- Bree Bode, MPH student, Grand Valley State University
- Angelina Gero, MPH student, Grand Valley State University
- Anurahda Jetty, MPH graduate, George Mason University
- Kendall Leser, PhD Candidate, The Ohio State University
- Erin Linden, MPH student, University of Minnesota
- J.P. Mahoehney, MPH student, University of Minnesota
- Meredith Williams, MPH student, Medical College of Wisconsin

Training Outcomes

Fellows complete pre- and post-assessments to assess their change in knowledge about the field of health and disability. A summary of results are below:

Communication & Inclusion

- Pre-assessment: Fellows focused on accommodations needed for some people with disabilities to be able to communicate successfully.
- Post-assessment: Fellows recognized that organizations like NACCHO need to communicate better with LHDs so they understand disability and how to put accommodations in place at the local level.

Culture, Diversity, & Community of People with Disabilities

- Pre-assessment: Fellows paid particular attention to the deaf community and noted that a one-size-fits-all approach does not work for the population of people with disabilities.
- Post-assessment: There was not a great knowledge shift in this area; however, fellows noted that they were more confident working with LHDs to raise awareness about disability culture.

Public Health Leadership & Inclusion

- Pre-assessment: Fellows identified a need for champions within LHDs to serve as a voice for the importance of disability inclusion.
- Post-assessment: Fellows continued to recognize the importance of champions and the need for LHD staff to become trained about working with the population of people with disabilities.

Importance of Community-Based Organizations

- Pre-assessment: Fellows reported a limited knowledge of how community-based organizations relate to public health practice.
- Post-assessment: Fellows identified community-based organizations as extremely important for the success of disability inclusion at LHDs. One fellow from Year One stated, "I feel like community organizations, linkages, and relationships are extremely important for the successful inclusion of people with disabilities in public health practice. I believe that these partnerships with community-based organizations are perhaps the most effective way to locate and identify people with disabilities for emergency preparedness planning."

Lessons Learned

Implementing the Health and Disability Fellowship Program has been, and continues to be, a learning experience for NACCHO. Some lessons learned to date include:

- Fellows enter into the Health and Disability Fellowship Program with varying backgrounds, experiences, and strengths which all contribute to growth within NACCHO's organization;
- Implementing the fellowship program remotely has challenges, but is feasible with strong organizational skills of mentors/fellows and through regular phone and e-mail communications; and
- A variety of instructional methods should be used to cater to each fellow's individual learning styles.

Develop Your Own Fellowship Program

- Think about your organization's target audience and what you would want graduate-level fellows to learn about disability inclusion related to the target audience;
- Apply for funding in workforce development or other relevant areas. If no funding is available, consider how the fellowship could be added to existing projects;
- Use communication channels such as national listservs, Facebook, Twitter, etc. to spread the word about the fellowship opportunity;
- Provide fellows with reading materials to orient them to the emerging issues in the field of health and disability; and
- Encourage staff to receive trainings on effective ways to become a mentor to the fellows.

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