Assessing the Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities of Public Health Professionals in Big City Governmental Health Departments

Semi-structured Interview Questions

Overview of Project

The specific aims of this project are to: (1) identify and prioritize the skills needed among professional staff working in large, urban health departments; (2) characterize gaps in knowledge, skills, and abilities of these professionals and (3) develop recommendations to address these gaps.

Questions for Health Department Interviewees

Note: Priority questions are bolded. The research aim to which questions correspond is written in parentheses following the question. The corresponding question number for school/program of public health interviewees follows.

Target Interviewee: Senior health department official, workforce development lead or human resource director

Introduction

1. How long have you been in your current position/role as [title]? How long have you work at the department?

Professional Development

2. Has your department experienced challenges in ensuring that existing staff possess essential skills and knowledge to practice public health/to perform their job functions? (Aim 2) (Q2b)
   a. Prompt: If yes, what difficulties has your department encountered in ensuring that its workforce is appropriately skilled to deliver essential public health services/to perform their job functions? (Aim 3) (Q2b)
   b. Prompt: Has your department experienced challenges in attracting/hiring qualified staff? (Aim 3)
c. Prompt: Are there particular areas in which staff (current or prospective) specifically lacks essential skills or knowledge necessary for working in a local, urban health department? What are the major gaps in your professional staffs' knowledge, skills and abilities? (Aim 2) (Q2c)
d. Prompt: What skills or training would make the most difference or be most meaningful for staff? (Aim 1 & 3)

3. What professional development opportunities are available to your staff (Aim 3)?
   a. Prompt: Does your department provide formal continuing education, training or other professional development opportunities for staff internally within your department (e.g., on boarding, skill-based training, management training)?
      i. Prompt: Does your department develop professional development plans for employees?
      ii. Prompt: Are there opportunities for learning in place (e.g., experiential learning)? Or ways to quickly address skill gaps (e.g., e-learning)?
      iii. Prompt: Do you have any mentoring programs within your department? If yes, please describe these programs.
      iv. Prompt: Do staff use the existing resources that are available to them? What are the barriers to staff utilizing existing resources? (Aim 3)
   b. Prompt: Are there opportunities for staff to access continuing education, training and professional development outside of your organization (e.g., through public health training centers, nearby schools, private companies)?
      i. If yes, what professional development or training opportunities are offered (e.g., certification programs, non-degree programs, short courses)?
   c. Prompt: Is your department evaluating existing professional development opportunities? If so, what have you learned?
   d. Prompt: What trainings made the most difference or have been the most meaningful for staff? Do these opportunities meet the needs of staff? (Aim 3)

4. What, if anything, has hindered your ability to ensure staff access to necessary training and continuing education? (e.g., time, financing, bureaucratic procedures)

5. What would facilitate increased or improved training for staff (e.g., training as an allowable expense under federal or private grants)?

Collaboration and Practicum Opportunities

6. Does your health department view itself as an “academic health department”? What does it mean to you to be an “academic health department”?
   a. Prompt: Does your department provide input into the development of the curricula of your local, state or other school/program of public health? (Q3a)
b. Prompt: For example, do representatives from your department participate on a dean’s advisory council or other similar group in a school/program of public health?

7. Do you collaborate or work with your local school or program public health? (Q4)
   a. Prompt: If yes, in what capacity? If not, why not?
   b. Prompt: If no, are there others in your department that collaborate with schools or programs of public health? Are there formal or agency-wide relationships that foster collaboration?

8. Have you encountered challenges in collaborating with your local school of public health? (Q5)
   a. Prompt: If yes, what challenges or obstacles have you experienced?
   b. Prompt: What successes have you experienced?

9. Do you offer opportunities for students to complete internships or practicums in your health department? (Q6)
   a. Prompt: What has facilitated effective practicum or internship experiences? (Q6a)
   b. Prompt: Are there barriers to establishing or operating practicum or internship opportunities that are valuable and effective for both students and your organization? If yes, what are the most significant barriers? (Q6b)
   c. Prompt: Have you formally evaluated these internship/practicum experiences? (Q6c)
   d. Prompt: Why do you offer these placement opportunities (e.g., responsibility to train future workforce, enhanced capacity)? What do you find most valuable about these placements? (Q6d)

10. Do you have a mechanism for connecting with students from local schools/programs of public health who are seeking employment after graduation?
    a. What barriers are there for students seeking employment in governmental public health?

General/ Wrap Up

11. What is your greatest workforce development challenge? (Aim 2)

12. Have you ever worked in a school of public health? In your opinion, what is the single most important thing that can be done to improve the preparation of staff to work in large, urban health departments? (Aim 3) (Q9)

13. Is there anything else you would like to tell me? (Q10)
Questions for **School/Program of Public Health Interviewees**

**Target Interviewee:** Deans of public health practice or directors of an office of public health practice

**Introduction**

1. What is your role in your school/program of public health?
   a. Prompt: How long have you worked at the school/program?
   b. Prompt: How long have you been in your current position?

**Workforce Preparation**

2. In your view, what if anything, is your school/program’s role in preparing students to work in local public health departments?
   a. Prompt: Are your graduates interested in working in local public health?
   b. Does your program/school focus on preparing students for working in this setting?

3. Have you or your school/program experienced challenges in preparing students to work in local health departments? Is there any focus on local or large, urban health departments specifically?
   a. Prompt: What difficulties have you encountered in ensuring students possess essential skills and knowledge to practice public health in health departments?
   b. Prompt: Are there particular areas that you are aware of in which students specifically lack essential skills or knowledge necessary for working in a public health department?
   c. What strategies have you or your school/program successfully employed to prepare students for employment in public health departments?

**Collaboration and Practicum Opportunities**

4. Do you collaborate or work with your local, state or other nearby health department?

5. Have you encountered challenges in collaborating with your local health department?
   a. Prompt: If yes, what challenge or obstacles have you experienced (e.g., distance to school, logistics, compressed academic schedule, etc.)?
   b. What successes have you experienced?

6. In the development of program/degree curricula, do you actively seek input of the health department?
   a. Prompt: For example, do health department representatives participate on a dean’s advisory council or other similar group?

7. Are there local health departments in your area that view themselves as an “academic health department”? What does it mean to you to be an “academic health department”?
a. Prompt: If yes, in what capacity? If not, why not?
b. Prompt: If no, are there others in your school that collaborate with public health departments? Are their formal or school-level relationships that foster collaboration?

8. Does your school/program provide opportunities for your students to complete internships or practicums in local health departments?
   a. Prompt: What has facilitated effective practicum or internship experiences?
   b. Prompt: Are there barriers to establishing or operating practicum or internship opportunities that are valuable and effective for both students and health department partners? If yes, what are the most significant barriers?
   c. Prompt: Have you formally evaluated these internship/practicum experiences?
   d. Prompt: To what extent do students find these experiences valuable? What do students value most about these placements?

9. Do you have a mechanism for connecting students to health departments as potential employers after graduation?

Professional Development

10. What kinds of continuing professional development or training opportunities (e.g., certification programs, non-degree programs, short courses) does your school/program provide for health department staff (i.e., not your enrolled students)?
   a. Prompt: Are these opportunities free of charge?
   b. Prompt: Which trainings are most popular among health department staff?
   c. Prompt: Have you evaluated the usefulness of these training opportunities, and if so, what feedback have you gotten. What trainings made the most difference or have been the most meaningful for participants? (3c)
   d. Prompt: What, if anything, has hindered your ability to partner with local health departments to ensure access to training and continuing education for their staff?
   e. Prompt: From your point of view, what would facilitate increased or improved training for local health department staff (e.g., training as an allowable expense under federal or private grants)?

General/Wrap Up

11. Have you ever worked in a local public health department? In your opinion, what is the single most important thing that can be done to improve the preparation of students to work in large, urban health departments?

12. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?