Sustainable Policy Development in Environmental Public Health

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Environmental Public Health Leadership Institute Fellow:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Climate change, population growth, and public opinion constitute some of the most influential factors driving Environmental Public Health (EPH) to strategically incorporate sustainable policy into the way we do business. Sustainability has two distinct definitions as it pertains to EPH policy and this project plan. In the first definition, sustainable policy means policy that can live, breath, and evolve with emerging issues and technology. Policies should be built with a sound structure, yet have the malleability to adapt. In the second definition, sustainable policy must address the protection and enhancement of our most critical resources such as water, food, and air safety. This requires protecting the public at the point of exposure, but also protecting the source itself.

The focus of this project plan has been to examine first why gaps exist between current EPH policy and the needs of our community and environment. Not surprisingly, these gaps have not been created by any one element, rather a combination of issues such as a lack of resources, political pressure, and a lack of leadership. The second focus of this project is identifying leverage points and putting together practical tools to begin to develop sustainable EPH policy. A diverse group of stakeholders is being put together to set priorities and develop policy direction for EPH in Clark County. While the long term goal is to have this sustainable policy development group (SPDG) work on an ongoing basis with EPH issues, initially the focus will be on developing a rainwater catchment policy for beneficial reuse. The goal is to develop a policy that is efficient and effective in Clark County but could be used as a model for other jurisdictions as well. The SPDG is scheduled to begin working together in mid-2012.

INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND:

Problem Statement:

Why has Environmental Public Health been unable to develop sustainable policy that responds to emerging issues in land use, development, and resource protection?
This graph depicts the primary factors responsible for creating the challenge we face today. While new technology and new issues have emerged, in many instances little has been done to accommodate these concerns. The key leverage point is collaboration between stakeholders. By increasing that collaboration, we should then see an increase in written policy which should in turn create more consistency in the way regulations are carried out as everyone works from the same page. With those increases, tension between stakeholders should be decreased.

This gap represents the increasing tension between stakeholders as consistency decreases (see “shifting the burden” archetype). Closing this gap is key to the success of this project plan.
Causal Loop Diagrams and applicable Archetypes:

For this project plan, the “Shifting the Burden” archetype was selected. This archetype is appropriate because the issue of a lack of effective and common EPH processes is regularly “solved” with solutions that do not emphasize system sustainability. The key to success for this project is to have impact at the leverage points creating disincentives for these case by case solutions and using the tension created by the unintended consequences to build momentum for a sustainable solution.
10 Essential Environmental Health Services:
This project plan initially focuses on the **Policy Development** element of the 10 Essential Services, with the purposeful long term goal of positively impacting **Assurance, Assessment, and System Management**.

The formation of a SPDG will serve to **Mobilize Community Partnerships** by including stakeholders that represent the development community, sustainable technology design and installation community, interested citizens, and public health advocates. Together this diverse group of stakeholders will be able to develop a unique and unified vision for sustainable policy development and implementation.

Ultimately, the SPDG will work with elected officials to **Develop Policies** that represent the interests of both environmental sustainability as well as political sustainability. These policies will be based on community needs and data that demonstrate either the need to take action or potential solutions.

Finally, these efforts will be integrated as the group **Informs, Educates, and Empowers** the public and other potential stakeholders relative to particular policies or issues based on local priorities. This work will be prioritized and assigned based on the policy and the various strengths each stakeholder brings to the table. These efforts may be shared or assigned to one particular element.
National Goals Supported

The efforts of Clark County Environmental Public Health (CCEPH) to integrate sustainable Environmental Public Health policy supports the Healthy People 2020 Objectives, the National Strategy to Revitalize Environmental Public Health Services, and the Environmental Health Competency Project through an integrated approach to address community and resource needs.

The Healthy People 2020 Objectives\textsuperscript{1} identify the protection of surface and groundwater quality as one of the primary themes in support of the goal to “Promote health for all through a healthy environment.” While this project plan ultimately will lead to long term models for policy development and change, the immediate impact will be in programs related to drinking water quality and quantity. Utilizing water resource tools such as rainwater catchment and water reuse, property owners will have the opportunity to participate in small and large scale sustainable practices.

The National Strategy to Revitalize Environmental Public Health Services\textsuperscript{2} has identified six goals to revitalize and enhance environmental health efforts in local communities. This project plan directly supports three of these goals:

- Goal II: Support Research
- Goal IV: Communicate and Market
- Goal VI: Create Strategic Partnerships

Developing sustainable EPH policy using systems thinking tools will inherently draw in diverse stakeholders and create a community for change. This community will rely on research to determine the most important needs of the citizenry and identify the appropriate solutions. In order to then develop the actually policy, communication with local leaders and the citizenry at large will be critical to success. Finally, the basis of this process relies on a diverse group of stakeholders that can tackle strategic approaches to common issues.

The Environmental Health Competency Project\textsuperscript{3} emphasizes 13 non-technical competencies for environmental health professionals. The skills learned and developed through EPHLI emphasize the importance of these non-technical competencies and help to frame the effort for this project plan given the relatively limited resources at CCPH. Similar to the Ten Essential Public Health Services, these non-technical skills will be addressed in both the short and long term for this project. Policy development will rely on partnering, problem solving, and managing the work, while data analysis and evaluation will be critical to ongoing efforts.
Project Logic Model:

**Resources/Inputs**
- **Financial**
  - Existing capacity
  - Grant funding
- **Partners**
  - Development community
  - Citizen groups
  - State Agencies
  - Board of Health
  - Other Clark County Agencies
- **Historical Data**
  - Primarily from the various partners
  - Other state data
- **Technology**
  - Data gathering and sharing
  - Social media
  - Electronic communication

**Activities**
- **Create a Shared Vision**
  - Identify and bring together key members of the partners
  - Develop priorities and objectives
  - Identify overlap and gaps in the current systems
  - Establish common ground issues
- **Inform, Educate, and Empower the Public**
  - Identify efficient and effective outreach strategies
  - Identify target audiences
  - Develop useful tools to empower the public
- **Identifying Infrastructure and Communication Needs**
  - Establish where communication is/is not occurring
  - Communication with the public

**Outputs**
- # of meetings
- Regional workgroup/task force development
- list of priorities
- list of gaps and redundancy
- # of educational materials produced
- # of tools developed
- # of outreach events intended for broad audience
- common communication through website, blog, social media
- # of meetings
- plan for development of new communication/data sharing structure

**Outcomes**
- **Pilot Projects**
  - Collaborative projects
  - Shared monitoring and follow-up and utilization of a shared method of collecting and reviewing data
  - Common goals
- **Outreach**
  - Readily accessible materials through the development of website, blog, etc, tailored towards a targeted audience
  - Utilize current outreach plans and programs and integrate messages
- **Dialogue**
  - Shared discussions about new data, technology
  - Regular workgroup meetings to discuss recent projects and maintain strong relationships
  - Continued discussions and presentations with those in policy setting roles, as well as those behind new technology and development

**Impacts**
- **Relationships**
  - Long term stable relationships built between developers, regulators, and policy setters
  - Citizen groups feel connected with government
- **Behavior**
  - Project proposals will come in as a joint effort with input from various sources rather than the traditional adversarial approach
- **Results**
  - Improved public health through a more effective and efficient system of integrating new technology and systems related to sustainable building and development.
PROJECT OBJECTIVES/DESCRIPTION/DELIVERABLES:

Program Goal: To improve public health and the protection of natural resources through policy development that better integrates sustainable technology and systems into the built and living environments.

Health Problem: Increased population density, climate change, and hazardous household products will challenge the availability of safe and reliable drinking water.

Outcome Objective: CCEPH will engage key stakeholders in the development of a sustainable policy development group (SPDG) that will develop local policy for the implementation of rainwater catchment for use inside a building by the end of 2012. This policy development process will serve as a model for other identified priorities.

Determinant: Lack of policy that allows for sustainable options related to drinking water resources.

Impact Objective: By July 1, 2012, the SPDG will have established a unified vision and list of priorities for policy development related to drinking water.

Contributing Factors:
- History of a sometimes adversarial relationship between regulators and the sustainable community.
- Fluctuation in political interest.
- Lack of consistent public outreach and education about the benefits to public health of sustainable approaches.
- Lack of leadership from state or regional leaders.
- Absence of cohesive projects with shared planning, monitoring, and evaluation.
- Lack of training targeted at public health.

METHODOLOGY:

Process Objectives, Events, and Activities:
1. By March 1, 2012, complete outreach to potential stakeholders to develop the SPDG.  
   Event: Personal solicitation as well as general outreach through website, letters, email, and other communication.  
   Activities: Develop a question or problem statement (similar to that used for this project) to elicit interest.
2. By July 1, 2012 the SPDG will have begun the process of identifying a strategic vision by identifying gaps and barriers to sustainable policy. The SPDG will have identified five policy targets and associated timelines to go with those policies to be moved forward as a group.
Event: Initial and subsequent meetings culminating in the draft of a policy memorandum supported by the SPDG.
Activities: Develop agendas, plan schedule for meetings, identify other interested parties, develop draft priorities.

3. By December 31, 2012, the SPDG will have developed a policy recommendation for at least one of the five policy targets. This policy recommendation may be directed at program managers, elected officials, or other groups as appropriate.
Event: Presentation of the policy recommendation for rainwater catchment.
Activities: Identifying appropriate audience for the presentation, development of the presentation, outreach to applicable partners/stakeholders.

NEXT STEPS:

Following the completion of the first policy recommendation and presentation it will be critical for the SPDG to address evaluation of the policy. This will likely be a complex challenge given the limited resources available, however effective data collection and tracking will play a large role in the sustainability of the policy as well as that of future policies.

The work group will also have to identify more efficient ways to share information across channels. Strategies for data sharing may include a shared website, database, or other data management tool identified by the SPDG.

CONCLUSIONS:

This project plan will act as a guide for the development of sustainable environmental health policy in Clark County. While particular issues will be dealt with individually, it will be important to tie each policy recommendation or draft to the initial vision of the SPDG in order to achieve continuity and success. These policies must then be evaluated and tracked to assess the viability of the policy and continue to monitor and close gaps.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES:

Aaron J. Henderson

The Environmental Public Health Leadership Institute has provided me with remarkable opportunities to learn more about myself, my organization, and public health in general. The skills and lessons I have developed and identified will have a lasting impact on my career.

The work that was done through the Individual Development Plan, 360 Assessment, and personality trait assessments opened my eyes to who I really am both as a leader and as a person. These observations of how I may be perceived and how I may perceive others at times struck me as new information, and at others reinforced my previous assumptions. Taking that knowledge and then applying it to organizational learning presented a tremendous leap for me. Through the study of systems thinking, I learned how to identify the real issue when problem solving and how to begin to ask the right questions and recognize a real answer from a band-aid. Since that first
week in Atlanta, I still have a rubberband pulled between two tacks to remind me of the tension I need to maintain in my daily work. The final piece of the puzzle was almost overwhelming as I sat in a room with amazing peers and talked about how organizations fit into communities. Both our local communities, and the public health community at large. Public Health unlike a lot of professions really benefits tremendously from the “think globally, act locally” mantra. Public Health issues know no borders, and what we do with our neighbor across the street should be the same thing we would do for our neighbor across a state or county line.

I am tremendously thankful the opportunity to learn from the many professionals who facilitated the EPHLI program, as well as from the other fellows whom I worked alongside for the last 12 months.
ABOUT THE EPHLI FELLOW

Aaron Henderson has worked in the Environmental Public Health field for nearly six years. During that time, Aaron has worked for Island County Public Health as an On-Site Sanitarian before being promoted to Environmental Health Director. In mid-2011 he took a position as Environmental Health Program Manager at Clark County Public Health (CCPH). At CCPH Aaron manages the on-site sewage, drinking water, and water recreation programs as well as working with staff in the food safety, solid waste, and vector control programs. This work includes program planning, development, and management; staff development; strategic planning; and building emergency preparedness capacity. Aaron holds the On-Site Wastewater Treatment System Inspector certification as well as being a Qualified Sanitary Surveyor.

In addition to his responsibilities at CCPH Aaron serves on a number of committees and work groups dedicated to public health. He currently serves as chair of the Washington State Environmental Health Directors group, as well as maintaining a position on the Board of Directors for the Washington State Association of Local Public Health Officials. In cooperation with the Washington State Department of Health Aaron has participated in rule making committees for state regulations related to Greywater Reuse and small public water systems. As Aaron’s time with the EPHLI comes to a close, he will begin a two year term on the Children’s Health Protection Advisory Committee with the Environmental Protection Agency.

Aaron’s love for environmental public health is based in his passion for combining science, policy development, and public outreach. In addition to his interest in sustainable environmental health policy, Aaron is passionate about the impacts of environmental influences on pregnant women and young children.
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