

Stories from the Field: Washington

Making It Real from Planning to Action

When staff of the Washington Department of Health revamped and launched their 10-year obesity prevention plan in July 2008, they attracted attention from across the state. In a bold step to stop the obesity epidemic, the plan included not only policy and environmental approaches but also concrete examples of activities conducted across the state. With a new focus on policy, disparities, and communication, local health jurisdictions (LHJs) and community partners jumped at the opportunity to review the plan during one of six regional launches. The launches were held in the cities of Ellensburg, Tacoma, Vancouver, Mount Vernon, Aberdeen, and Tri-Cities. LHJs helped to host and arrange logistics for each meeting by securing free space, providing refreshments, and sending invitations. The Washington Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity (NPAO) Section organized the agenda, planned discussion topics for breakout sessions, and presented at the launches, which helped eliminate speaker costs.

"To reach more rural areas, we chose [to host six regional launches] rather than having one large launch," said Kyle Unland, former NPAO Section manager. "One challenge was convincing all LHJ's that they should attend. Many rural LHJ's have minimal staffing, and it was difficult to get the time away from work ... Also, based on feedback from local public health agencies, many of them did not know about the state plan, especially rural areas. Other counties were aware of the state plan, but they did not know how to implement it ... or did not have the capacity to engage in policy and environmental change."

So what did Washington do to increase capacity and awareness?

"We asked what technical assistance they needed to start and/or continue implementing the state plan. We then tailored each regional launch to the needs of LHJ's and asked attendees to sign a pledge card to become 'Partners of Plan,'" said Kyle.

As official Plan Partners, more than 100 local groups, communities, and organizations agreed to put the state plan into action by strengthening existing partnerships or forming new ones. According to one meeting attendee, "I enjoyed the summit, especially the opportunity to network/meet representatives from various agencies."



Plan Partners represented a cross-section of communities including public health, YMCA, city and county public works, local businesses, elected officials, transportation, non-profit organizations, hospitals, schools, and food service.

Importance of Early Success

Evaluations showed that the meeting increased participants' knowledge of the updated Nutrition and Physical Activity State Plan, allowed attendees to recognize the importance of leveraging resources, and helped attendees become more aware of promising opportunities for policy and environmental changes in their communities. Capacity to implement the plan was enhanced as partners engaged in facilitated discussions and promising practices, program facilitators, and barriers were shared.



Lessons Learned

- Involve local health departments as partners at the beginning of the planning process to decrease meeting costs.
- Hold meetings in different regions throughout the state to strengthen partnerships with rural LHJ's and improve attendance and community buy-in.
- Tailor the meeting agendas to the priorities and technical assistance needs of the different regions.
- Share promising practices and concrete examples to enhance partners' capacity to implement state plan activities.



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