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STATEMENT OF POLICY

Building a Strong Brand to Increase the Visibility and Value of Local Health Departments

Policy

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) recommends local health departments adopt the business practice of branding to raise the visibility, perceived value, and reputation of their organizations. Branding communicates what the health department stands for and what it provides the community that is unique and differentiated from other agencies and organizations.¹

NACCHO encourages local health departments to:

- Follow best practices for developing and implementing an effective brand strategy, as outlined in NACCHO guidance materials.² The brand strategy should align with the health department's vision, mission, and values, and communicate the value of the department's practices, products, and services to internal and external audiences.
- Ensure senior staff members have a foundational knowledge of organizational branding principles and practices.
- Recognize branding as a highly collaborative process in which employees at all levels should contribute to the departmental brand strategy and serve as ambassadors of the local health department in the community.
- Incorporate the local health department's brand into internal quality improvement activities, including the departmental strategic plan, voluntary accreditation, organizational development initiatives, staff member trainings, and new employee orientations.
- Integrate the local health department's brand into departmental communication plans, communication channels (e.g., website, social media, listservs), written and visual communications (e.g., media releases, grant applications, annual reports, brochures, videos) and verbal communication (e.g., conversations with external audience members, presentations, speeches).
- Recognize the essential role of public health communicators (e.g., public information officers, public health educators, media specialists, social marketers, government affairs specialists) in developing, promoting, and ensuring the integrity of the local health department brand.
- Build local health department communications capacity by employing communication and marketing professionals, or ensuring that such experts are available to the local health department.³
- Consider using the National Identity for Public Health Departments (i.e., the public health logo) as a stand-alone logo or in conjunction with an organization's existing logo.

Justification

Local health departments provide essential services to the community—yet their good work often goes unnoticed and underfunded. While the public may value prevention and other public health activities,



they may not connect this work with local health departments. Through branding, local health departments can better communicate why the organization exists and how it adds value.

NACCHO and the Public Health Accreditation Board endorse branding practices. As of July 2014, state, local, and tribal health departments applying for voluntary accreditation are required to have an organizational brand strategy (see Public Health Accreditation Board Measure 3.2.2: Organizational Branding Strategy).¹ Branding is an important quality improvement initiative for health departments. It encompasses strategic planning, organizational change, and effective communication.

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) has made significant changes to health care financing and delivery. Representing an unprecedented national commitment to prevention, the ACA presents tremendous opportunities and challenges for local health departments. Local health departments can become leaders and partners in transforming America's health by thinking and acting strategically in this shifting political and fiscal landscape. This can be accomplished, in part, by forging stronger relationships with hospitals and nonprofit organizations, and building a 21st century workforce skilled in organizational leadership, communication, policy development, and technology.

As local health department officials position their organizations in this fast-changing environment, they must ask themselves:

1. Does my local health department consistently deliver programs and services important to community members, funders, and other key stakeholders?
2. How can my local health department position itself as a trusted community leader and agent of change on public health issues affecting the community?
3. How can my local health department become more valued by and visible to policymakers, funders, media professionals, and the general public?
4. Is my local health department delivering on the promises we are making to our community? Are we evaluating our programs for effectiveness and reporting those results to the community?

The responses to these questions—which address both the quality of a local health department and how the organization is perceived by external audiences—define a local health department's brand and reputation.

A strong brand helps communicate that the local health department and its services are relevant and uniquely able to meet community needs.¹ Brand is more than a logo. The local health department brand is formed by the organization's every communication, action, and interaction with the public and other stakeholders. If a local health department is delivering high quality services and is valued by stakeholders, then the organization may have increased funding opportunities and experience fewer challenges when working with stakeholders to improve the health of the community.

The brand strategy process begins with research to learn how staff members and key external stakeholders (e.g., the public, elected officials, partner organizations) perceive the organization and to identify attributes of the local health department that are unique, important, and valued. This "discovery" process is also useful for identifying brand weaknesses that diminish the trust and credibility of a local health department. Using this research, local health departments can develop position statements, message platforms for different audiences, and a visual identity (e.g., logo, tagline).

The local health department brand strategy can and should be integrated into departmental communication plans, communication channels (e.g., website, social media, listservs), written and visual

communications (e.g., media releases, grant applications, annual reports, brochures, videos), and verbal communication (e.g., one-on-one interactions, presentations, speeches).

It is important to recognize that communication and marketing staff members have an essential role in promoting and ensuring the integrity of the organization’s brand, including sharing its stories and successes. Public health communication professionals also contribute to the overall effectiveness of the organization by communicating accurate, consistent, and credible information to key audiences; designing health marketing campaigns; developing communication plans; and building communication capacity within the department.³

Through developing and implementing an organizational brand strategy—in concert with pursuing other quality improvement initiatives and working within recognized frameworks for local public health service delivery— local health departments can improve the quality of services, strengthen organizational culture, and better engage the community and other stakeholders.

References

1. Public Health Accreditation Board. (2013). “Measure 3.2.2 A: Organizational Branding Strategy.” Public Health Accreditation Board Standards & Measures, Version 1.5. Retrieved Jan. 20, 2016, from <http://www.phaboard.org/wp-content/uploads/SM-Version-1.5-Board-adopted-FINAL-01-24-2014.docx.pdf>.
2. National Association of County and City Health Officials. Branding webpage. Retrieved Jan. 20, 2016, from <http://www.naccho.org/communications/hd-communications/brand.cfm>.
3. NACCHO Public Health Communications Committee. “Communication and Marketing: A Foundational Capability for Local Health Departments National Association of County and City Health Officials.” Retrieved Jan. 20, 2016, from <http://www.naccho.org/communications/upload/Communications-Foundational-Capabilities.pdf>.

Additional Reading

1. NACCHO *Exchange*, Spring 2012, Communicating the Value of Local Health Departments, Washington, DC, 2011.
2. National Association of County and City Health Officials. Branding webpage. Retrieved Jan. 20, 2016, from <http://www.naccho.org/communications/hd-communications/brand.cfm>.

Record of Action

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