Community Dialogues to Improve County Health

A joint project of the National Association of Counties, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute

Background:
County policymakers serve critical roles in ensuring the day-to-day health of the communities they represent. Many of the policies and initiatives they develop and implement directly affect the health and well-being of their county residents and can have significant and positive community health impacts. To build and sustain effective local health promotion efforts, community-wide collaboration is necessary. County officials are well-positioned to lead and coordinate local collaborative health initiatives because they have the capacity to bring together, not only county staff from a range of different departments, but also other local stakeholders, business leaders and community members.

In 2013, the National Association of Counties (NACo) was awarded funding through the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), with support from the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute (UWPHI), to form a NACo-driven information assistance hub to help counties learn how they can use information from the annual County Health Rankings & Roadmaps initiative to help improve overall health in communities.

Through NACo’s collaboration with RWJF and UWPHI, NACo will be conducting a one day community dialogue in each local jurisdiction selected, to convene county officials and additional community stakeholders to assess, plan and strategize efforts in coordinating health initiatives to improve county health. Community dialogues will not only allow communities to synergize efforts and build coalitions, but also collaborate and leverage local efforts already in place. Successful dialogues will include communities that as a result of the initial one day meeting create a coalition or further enhance a current group and outline strategies to continue to address the county’s local health needs. NACo will work with local jurisdictions to develop the agenda and identify and invite local participants from the health sector, transportation, parks and recreation, business, schools, faith-based organizations, nonprofits, health mobilization groups, local United Way, and other community partners.

Format:
A community dialogue will bring together county officials and their invited local stakeholders (e.g., non-profits, organizations on aging, economic development, parks and recreation, school, faith-based organizations) for a day of brainstorming and strategizing. Through a facilitated discussion, the group will share insights on the challenges and opportunities facing the local government in addressing community health. A community dialogue takeaway is a concrete strategic plan and action steps that the county government and community partners can use to improve the overall health of the county. Tools through the County Health Roadmaps will assist in the strategic planning and action step process.
Prior to the community dialogue, NACo will assist the local jurisdiction in completing a community-scan to review the programs and resources already in place and available to community members to address barriers and challenges to creating a healthy community. The community scan will include a form of asset mapping, a visual representation of important sites and services within the community, allowing the community to see the concentration of available programs, service overlaps, gaps in services and unmet community health needs. Geographic Information System (GIS) is one of the mapping tools that may be used to capture, analyze and present data of current programs and services and data on the county’s current health factors through the County Health Rankings.

A moderator/facilitator will be available to assist the local jurisdictions in facilitating the one day meeting.

**Eligibility Criteria:**
Community dialogues are open to all NACo member counties.

**Selection Criteria:**
Communities will be selected based on the responses to the application. NACo and RWJF will be reviewing the applications and will select local jurisdictions based on the demonstrated need, commitment to strategic health improvement, the county’s involvement and leadership, and community partner representation. NACo and RWJF will consider how the county collaborates (or its ideas to facilitate or strengthen collaboration) and creatively addresses local issues and how the county addressed or is seeking to address vulnerable populations. To apply, click [here](http://www.naco.org/programs/csd/Documents/RWJF_County_Health_Rankings_Initiative/Community_Dialogue_Application.pdf) or go to [http://www.naco.org/programs/csd/Documents/RWJF_County_Health_Rankings_Initiative/Community_Dialogue_Application.pdf](http://www.naco.org/programs/csd/Documents/RWJF_County_Health_Rankings_Initiative/Community_Dialogue_Application.pdf).

**Cost:**
NACo will assist the county in covering costs associated with each dialogue. Costs may include printing materials for the event; catering during the event, pre and post-community dialogue preparation (e.g., community-scan, asset mapping, invitations, post-report preparation). NACo will work with the local jurisdictions to identify and secure meeting space. Any costs associated with the meeting space will be covered by NACo.

**Objectives:**
The dialogues are designed to:
- Provide county officials and other stakeholders a forum to identify and discuss challenges and opportunities to improving county health.
- Share targeted best practices for successful policies and programs.
- Develop a concrete collaborative action plan that includes specific action steps for each stakeholder.
- Develop project timeline for the county’s subsequent meetings to bring the group or working groups together to:
  - Report progress;
  - Discuss challenges in meeting goals;
  - Review sustainability of the efforts; and
  - Consider new resources and information.

**Activities**
Throughout the community dialogue, a variety of activities will be used to foster community collaboration. These activities will engage stakeholders at all levels, breakdown silos, drive innovation, and institute partnerships and collaboration among a variety of community stakeholders to work together to define a unanimous project scope, roles and responsibilities.

**More information:**
A publication documenting all the community dialogues, including the process, strategies and action steps, will be developed and disseminated to the participating communities and shared with RWJF. For more information, please contact Katie Bess, [kbess@naco.org](mailto:kbess@naco.org) or 202.942.4215 or visit [http://www.naco.org/improvingcountyhealth](http://www.naco.org/improvingcountyhealth).