

Engaging Public Health Practice and Academia: a Model for Public Health Partnership at
Kansas State University
Engagement Incentive Grant
Final Report

I. Summary of activity

a. In order to better understand skills that students should possess to be successful within a field experience and career in public health sectors, this project aimed to create a model for engaging public health practice and academia. The goals for this project were to foster collaboration between local health departments, and Extension agents, and public health students and faculty; and to establish public health practice and academic relationships that will be sustained in order to explore an academic health department model at Kansas State University.

b. This project was carried out in Kansas in the following counties:

Kansas Counties
Douglas
Geary
Hodgeman
Johnson
Riley
Saline
Sedgewick
Shawnee
Wyandotte

c. This project was carried out from September 2017 to December 2018.

d. The type of actions included in the project were both outreach and planning for future training. A survey was created to be given to past field experience preceptors and potential employers within 9 counties in Kansas. The counties for this project were selected based on past field experience locations. Following the survey, face-to-face meetings were set with public health department directors, Extension agents, and past field experience preceptors to establish and nurture practice-academic relationships. Data from these surveys were analyzed for themes related to field experiences and career preparation. With stakeholder participation, these findings will be applied to program practice. The feedback provided by participants will allow for improvement in field experience planning, and development of graduate employment strategies. The relationships that were built with local health department directors and Extension agents will later be used to facilitate outreach to employers and community agencies.

e. The project partners

- i. Extension partners included Extension agents from the following counties: Douglas, Geary, Hodgeman, Johnson, Riley, Sedgwick, Shawnee, and Wyandotte.
 - ii. Community partners included staff members and directors from local health departments from the following counties: Douglas, Geary, Hodgeman, Johnson, Riley, Saline, Sedgwick, Shawnee, and Wyandotte.
 - iii. The project staff team included Heather Poole, MPH student and Ellyn Mulcahy, MPH program director.
 - f. The roles that each partner played in this project were as follows:
 - i. Extension agents:
 - County Extension Agent
 - Office Professional
 - County Extension Director
 - Leader, Extension Operations
 - Nutrition Assistant
 - ii. Community partners:
 - County Health Department Director
 - Assistant Director
 - Epidemiologist
 - Workforce Development/Student Intern Coordinator
 - Program Manager
 - Environmental Program Manager
 - Public Health Emergency Preparedness Coordinator
 - Workforce Development Coordinator
 - Health Educator
 - Safe Kids Coordinator

II. The impacts of this work

- a. Conference presentations: the project and results have been presented at the 2018 Kansas Public Health Association Conference, the 2018 North Carolina Public Health Association Conference, the Spring 2018 Graduate Research Forum, and the 2018 Research and the State Forum. Attendance and presentation of this project at public health conferences allows for colleagues to learn about current public health workforce skills in order to strengthen the workforce in their agency.
- b. Publishing this project in a journal of public health will be pursued in 2019 following more in depth data analysis and coding for themes related major components of the project.
- c. Reports: a whitepaper summarizing the project goals and process was shared with project partners. A final report summarizing feedback from the

interviews and surveys and outcomes of the project will be shared with the project partners in 2019.

- d. Community or organizational changes: information regarding Kansas public health workforce and career preparedness will be incorporated into Master of Public Health curriculum, student advising and preparation for public health practice.

This project allowed for the development and nurturing of academic practice relationships in nine county health departments and six Extension offices. Not all Extension offices that were contacted in the nine counties with health departments surveyed participated in this project. The relationships built and nurtured will allow for future placement of MPH students in field experiences as well as potential opportunities for employment for students after graduation.

III. Self-assessment of your project

- a. Successes: overall, this project has proven to be very beneficial to the improvement of the Kansas State Master of Public Health program. The surveys and interviews provided stakeholders with knowledge on how to improve the field experience process, current workforce skills necessary to be successful in a public health career, and current public health workforce needs in Kansas. We believe that having a student to complete the project increased participant willingness to provide feedback of the program during face-to-face interviews.
- b. Challenges:
 - i. Stakeholder participation proved to be the greatest challenge for this project. Several Extension agents did not participate in the project because they felt as though their input would not be beneficial, or they thought they were lacking public health knowledge, or did not feel as though their job was in the public health sector. This is an avenue of discussion that is important for public health in Kansas and how the public health workforce is identified. Achieving contact with the desired participants was challenging in some cases. Contact was achieved via email, phone, and word of mouth from their colleagues. Some individuals did not respond to numerous attempts of either.
 - ii. Travel to the locations of the different partners was also challenging to co-ordinate and required more than one trip to a single geographical location; this was more than anticipated and impacted the funds that were allocated to travel.
 - iii. Time is required to complete the analysis in more detail. This would be an important last step of this project to code the transcripts from in-person interviews to develop themes and sub-themes for engagement of the public health community in Kansas.