

RWJF ID#: 70621

Team Name: San Luis Valley Public Health Partnership

Major activities: Six local public health agencies worked collaboratively to build a regional partnership that would facilitate cross-jurisdictional sharing (CJS) arrangements with a specific goal of optimizing the effectiveness, efficiency, capacity, and performance of core public health services for their combined 46,000 residents.

The group had met informally for many years, and through this grant they sought to formalize their partnership. The group hired a project coordinator and contracted with a professional facilitator to guide their efforts, and the San Luis Valley Public Health Partnership (SLVPHP) grew out of their efforts. SLVPHP engaged in strategic planning, monthly conference calls and quarterly in-person meetings. These convenings served to establish the group's structure and operations, and also to discuss current issues, opportunities and events. SLVPHP also developed an inventory on existing CJS arrangements throughout the region.

SLVPHP worked hard to engage the policymakers throughout the San Luis Valley, recognizing the benefits of having their formal support. Thirty local policymakers and public health representatives attended a meeting held during the site visit SLVPHP hosted as one of their grant requirements, including seventeen county commissioners and two County Administrators. SLVPHP established a seat on its board of directors for one county commissioner, who also serves as a liaison to the San Luis Valley County Commissioners Association (also known as SLVCCA, and comprising all of the region's commissioners). The liaison participated in all of the partnership meetings, assisted with strategies to effectively communicate about SLVPHP activities and issues with commissioners, and helped design an inter-governmental agreement to formally support the partnership.

SLVPHP also oversaw a regional environmental health assessment to determine the needs of individual counties and consider how a regional program might be structured. This work included lengthy discussions about fee schedules, staffing, and the hiring entity.

SLVPHP implemented a communications plan focused on their website and a routine electronic newsletter. The website was branded with a partnership logo and houses all of the partnership information, including a meeting calendar, articles on current SLVPHP events and milestones, announcements, and links to the Center's website. The electronic newsletter is regularly sent to seventy individuals, including members of SLVCCA, the San Luis Valley Council of Governments and other partners. Website visits increase markedly following a newsletter release.

Accomplishments: SLVPHP is a formal entity that has leveraged funding to continue the project coordinator position. An inter-governmental agreement signed by the chair of each county commission in the region formally recognizes and supports the partnership and local health official participation in partnership activities. SLVPHP generated a mission, vision, value statement and guiding principles. They also established an operating agreement that

addresses the partnership's leadership, decision-making, and other operational structures and processes. The SLVPHP communicates with key stakeholders on a regular basis, and continues to hold routine meetings focused on collaborating for effective and efficient public health services and programs.

Oftentimes, the SLVCCA meeting agendas now include an item on SLVPHP issues. This reflects a shift from how SLVPHP first approached the policymakers, i.e., they started by identifying opportunities to convene SLVCCA members solely for the purposes of addressing public health issues. Asking the SLVCCA to include public health as an agenda item not only makes it easier to direct their attention accordingly, it also elevates public health to the same level of importance as other public services and functions routinely addressed by SLVCCA. This action represents a significant accomplishment for taking a shared approach to public health in the San Luis Valley.

SLVPHP also developed and implemented a Regional Environmental Health Program. Environmental health services had been provided by the state. The CJS arrangement provided the staff capacity and resources to implement a Regional Environmental Health Program, which made it possible to deliver environmental health services through the region without relying on state's staff. The program costs reflect an intensely negotiated agreement regarding staff salary and the travel reimbursement rate, as these amounts vary across the participating counties. The carefully negotiated cost allocations vary by county, and take into account travel distances (a significant factor given the vastness of the region), the number of facilities to inspect, population numbers and the estimated amount of time environmental health staff spend in the various jurisdictions.

Challenges: Three of the six public health directors left their positions during the two-year grant period. While this amount of turnover was higher than usual, it highlighted the need to carefully enlist the participation of new directors in the partnership. To this end, the project coordinator developed an orientation program for new directors. The three new directors were willing to continue participating in and supporting Partnership goals.

Due to term limits, it also will be important to engage new county commissioners as turnover occurs with this group. The project coordinator will work with SLVCCA members in the future to deliver portions of the orientation program to incoming county commissioners.

Finally, over the past several months, one SLVPHP county has been in the process of forming a public health district with a county that is part of a neighboring partnership. One person is currently serving as director for both of the health departments and participates in both partnerships. At this point, it is unknown whether the new public health district configuration will affect SLVPHP. However, if that county no longer participates in SLVPHP there could be implications for CJS arrangements in which the county is currently involved.