



North Carolina

LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT ACCREDITATION

Site Visitor Interview Guide

Sample Questions

The following lists provide **examples** of questions that may be included in interviews of individuals and groups participating in a health department site visit. Each site visitor should develop a line of questioning appropriate for each interview subject based on information gathered from the HDSAI, documentation offered in support of the HDSAI and other interview subjects. **The goal of the interviews is to clarify, verify and amplify the information from those sources.** In pursuing this goal, Site Visitors may choose to use all, some or none of the questions on these lists.

A. General Questions (for any interviewee)

1. Briefly describe the county.
 - Demographics: population, size, political leadership, diversity, insured vs. uninsured
 - Other health care resources in the county: private, not-for-profit
 - Nearest tertiary hospital and/or referral pattern for the LHD
 - Economy: primary industry and/or employer(s)
 - Geography: urban, rural, mixed; growing, static, declining
2. How long have you resided in this county?
3. How long have you been employed at this health department (or have you served your current organization)?
4. How long have you been in your current position?
5. How long has the Health Director been in his/her position?
6. How many different Health Directors have you worked with/for in this county?
7. Does the Health Director have the support of the County Manager?
8. Does the Health Director have the support of the Board of Health?
9. Does the Health Director have the support of the Board of County Commissioners?
10. What are the Health Department's most significant contributions to the community?
11. What do you think the people of this community understand about the role of the Health Department?
12. Does the Health Department play a leadership role within the local health care community?

B. County Manager

Purpose of the Interview

- Determine how and to what degree the County Manager supports the local health department and the Health Director
- Evaluate the County Manager's knowledge of public health issues and responsibilities
- Explore general financial issues
- Discuss the relationship/partnership the Health Department has with the county.
- Discuss the county's personnel and performance appraisal system

Sample Questions

1. How does the local health department and/or its director interact with other county departments and other department heads? (e.g., Department of Social Services, Board of Education, Economic Development, Planning and Inspections, Human Resources/Personnel, etc.)
2. How are personnel policies established and by whom (i.e., Does the agency have latitude beyond or instead of county policies?)
3. Does the county have a grievance policy for its employees? Is there a separate grievance policy for the health department?
4. What is the county's performance appraisal system? Does the health department have a separate appraisal system? How often is employee performance evaluated?
5. Does the county have a county-wide career development program for its employees?
6. What support does the county give
 - For the continuing education of its health department employees?
 - For professional development of management and/or staff?
 - For employees whose credentials and/or licensure depend upon meeting CE requirements?
7. Are health department staff salaries commensurate with similar job classifications
 - In this county?
 - In comparable counties?
 - In neighboring counties?
 - How does this impact the hiring/retention of qualified staff for the health department?
8. Who participates in the budget projection/preparation process?
9. What percentage of health department revenue is generated by:
 - County funds
 - State funds
 - Medicaid reimbursements
 - Private pay
 - Grants and contracts
10. Is there a county attorney available to the health department? How often and for what purposes is his/her legal advice sought?
11. What are some problems and challenges currently being faced by the health department?

C. Board of Health (BOH) Members

Purpose of the Interview

- Assess the level of involvement with the Health Director and the health department
- Evaluate the board member's knowledge of their role and responsibilities
- Discuss: A) how the BOH functions; B) the legal responsibilities of the BOH; and C) the relationship between the BOH and the Health Director
- Assess the training of the Board of Health members
- Discuss the process of hiring and evaluating a Health Director
- Describe the county's public health priorities and how they are determined

Sample Questions

1. Can the board member articulate the county's health priorities?
2. What is the number and frequency of Board of Health meetings annually?
3. Describe the attendance at Board of Health meetings? How many (if any) meetings have been cancelled due to a lack of quorum?
4. How are Board members appointed? By whom? By what process?
5. Have there been any difficulties in finding interested, capable people to fill discipline-specific seats? Have there been any difficulties in finding interested, capable people to fill the member-at-large seats?
6. Is there an orientation program for Board members?
7. Are Board of Health members trained appropriately regarding their statutory powers and rule-making authority?
8. What is the involvement of the Board in the community?
9. How clearly does the Board differentiate between its policy-making role and the management role of the Health Director and the health department staff?
10. What is the Board's relationship with the Health Director and the senior staff members of the health department (e.g., division directors)?
11. What is the process for hiring the Local Health Director? Who is on the search committee and who determines the composition of the committee?
12. What is the process for appraising the performance of the Local Health Director? How often is the appraisal performed and who is responsible for the appraisal?
13. What percentage of health department revenue is generated by:
 - County funds
 - State funds
 - Medicaid reimbursements
 - Private pay
 - Grants and contracts
14. Are the health department's funding and expenditure patterns in line with the priorities identified in the Community Health Assessment? If not, why not?
15. What local rules or ordinances has the Board enacted in the past 3-4 years?
16. Are there any **local** rules or ordinances regarding Environmental Health in this county? If so, how are the local rules or ordinances monitored or enforced?
17. Is there a county attorney available to the health department? How often and for what purposes is his/her legal advice sought?
18. What are some problems and challenges currently being faced by the health department?

D. Health Director

Purpose of the Interview

- Discuss the accreditation process
- Discuss and assess the Health Director's view on:
 - the strengths of the agency
 - the weaknesses of the agency
 - the challenges facing the agency
 - the relationship with staff members
 - the relationship with the Board of Health
 - the relationship with county government
- Describe the process used in his/her hiring and evaluation
- Describe opportunities for continuing education
- Discuss the working relationship between the Health Director, the Board of Health and the Board of Health Chair
- Discuss agency challenges and opportunities
- Discuss personal challenges and opportunities

Sample Questions

1. How supportive of public health is the County Manager?
2. How supportive of public health is the County Commissioner on the Board?
3. What role does the Health Director play at Board of Health meetings?
4. How does communication flow up to the Board of Health and down to the agency's staff members?
5. What is the composition of the health department's Management Team?
6. What is the function of the health department's Management Team?
7. Are health department staff salaries commensurate with similar job classifications
 - In this county?
 - In comparable counties?
 - In neighboring counties?
 - How does this impact the hiring/retention of qualified staff for the health department?
8. Describe the process for preparing the health department's annual budget. Who has input? Who recommends it?
9. In the overall county budget process for setting priorities, is public health a high priority? If not, please explain.
10. How frequently is the Health Director's job description reviewed?
11. How frequently is the Health Director's job performance evaluated? Who is responsible for the performance evaluation?
12. What does the Health Director do to keep his/her knowledge and skills current?
13. What is the Health Director's involvement in the community? In state organizations? In national organizations?
14. How prepared is the health department to respond to public health emergencies? Has this level of preparedness improved from a year ago? From two years ago?
15. What are some problems and challenges currently being faced by the health department?

E. Finance Officer

Purpose of the Interview

- Discuss the financial practices of the agency
- Describe the budget process
- Discuss the types and frequency of reports
- Comment on the financial status of the agency
- Describe sources of funding and grantsmanship
- Determine the preparation of the individual for the position
- Comment on personal aspects of the job (training, evaluation, etc.)

Sample Questions

1. What is the Finance Officer's understanding of the agency's organizational chart and where he/she fits into the organization?
2. Does the finance office have its own policy and procedure manuals?
3. Are financial reports submitted on time?
4. How are the health department's budget priorities established?
5. What percentage of health department revenue is generated by:
 - County funds
 - State funds
 - Medicaid reimbursements
 - Private pay
 - Grants and contracts
6. How does the health department manage grants and contracts?
7. Who is responsible for writing grant proposals for the health department?
8. On average, how many grants are sought and how many are won each year?
9. How does the health department's grant success (or lack of success) impact the health department's budget each year?
10. In the overall county budget process for setting priorities, is public health a high priority? If not, please explain.
11. Did the Finance Officer receive orientation training for the position?
12. Has the Finance Officer pursued professional development or continuing education opportunities while at the health department? Why or why not?
13. How frequently is the Finance Officer's job performance evaluated? Is the performance evaluation completed on time?
14. What are some problems and challenges currently being faced by the health department?

F. Personnel Officer

Purpose of the Interview

- Discuss the personnel system at the county and the agency level, including:
 - benefits
 - performance evaluations
 - incentives
 - challenges and concerns
- Describe the individual's relationship to A) State personnel; B) County personnel; C) agency staff and the D) Board of Health

Sample Questions

1. What is the Personnel Officer's understanding of the agency's organizational chart and where he/she fits into the organization?
2. Does the personnel office have its own goals and objectives? How do these goals and objectives fit with the health department's overall goals and objectives?
3. Does the personnel office have its own policy and procedure manuals?
4. How are priorities established regarding new positions requested by the health department?
5. What is the process for hiring the Local Health Director? Who is on the search committee and who determines the composition of the committee?
6. What is the process for appraising the performance of the Local Health Director? How often is the appraisal performed and who is responsible for the appraisal?
7. What is the county's performance appraisal system? Does the health department have a separate appraisal system? How often is employee performance evaluated?
8. What, if any, issues does the health department have with staff turnover? Staff morale?
9. How are personnel policies established and by whom? (i.e., Does the agency have latitude beyond or instead of county policies?)
10. Are there any incentives for advancement at the health department?
11. Are there any incentives that are specifically initiated by or encouraged by the county government?
12. Are health department staff salaries commensurate with similar job classifications
 - In this county?
 - In comparable counties?
 - In neighboring counties?
 - How does this impact the hiring/retention of qualified staff for the health department?
13. Did the Personnel Officer receive orientation training for the position?
14. Has the Personnel Officer pursued professional development or continuing education opportunities while at the health department? Why or why not?
15. Does the Personnel Officer conduct performance evaluations of other staff members? For whom? What is the frequency of the performance evaluations? Are the performance evaluations completed on time?
16. What are some problems or challenges currently being faced by the health department?

G. Members of the Management Team

Purpose of the Interview

- Determine the composition, the role and the responsibilities of the Agency Management Team
- Discuss the relationship of the Management Team to the Health Director and to the Board of Health (if applicable)
- Describe how the Management Team functions: A) how frequently are meetings held; B) what is the governance structure C) how do they conduct evaluations
- Discuss the training of the Management Team
- Assess the Management Team's awareness of the agency's philosophy, mission, goals, objectives, services, etc.

Sample Questions

1. What is the function and role of each member of the Management Team?
2. Who decides who will be a part of the Management Team?
3. Do Management Team members attend Board of Health meetings? When and why?
4. How do Management Team members communicate with the Board of Health members? How do Management Team members communicate with the rest of the agency staff?
5. Do Management Team members conduct meetings among the staff they supervise? When and why?
6. What is the Management Team's understanding of the agency's organizational chart and where they fit into the organization?
7. Are Management Team members familiar with the philosophy, mission, goals, objectives and services of the agency?
8. Does each unit represented by a Management Team member have its own goals and objectives? How do these objectives and goals fit with the health department's overall goals and objectives?
9. Do Management Team members receive financial statements regularly?
10. How does the health department determine IT needs? Who is responsible for maintaining the computer systems/programs?
11. Do Management Team members participate in developing grant proposals? How?
12. Do Management Team members participate in contract negotiations? How?
13. Did the Management Team members receive orientation training for their positions?
14. Do the Management Team members conduct performance evaluations of other staff members? For whom? What is the frequency of the performance evaluations? Are the performance evaluations completed on time?
15. How frequently are the Management Team members' job performance evaluated? Are the performance evaluations completed on time?
16. What are some problems or challenges currently being faced by the health department?

H. Supervisory, Professional and Administrative Support Staff

Purpose of the Interview

- Determine if each of the respective groups understand: A) their position within the organization B) their roles and responsibilities
- Describe how each group communicates (interdepartmentally and intradepartmentally) with members and with the agency
- Discuss how each group meets and how issues and concerns are communicated to the Health Director (and the BOH)
- Discuss the individuals preparation for the position:
 - Orientation
 - Continuing Education
 - Performance Evaluation
 - Resource allocations for any/all of the above
- Describe how their unit fits into the overall agency
- Discuss the agency's philosophy, mission, goals, objectives, services, etc.
- Describe the agency's success (and challenges) in working with "groups" and health department personnel

Sample Questions

1. What is the staff member's understanding of the agency's organizational chart and where they fit into the organization?
2. What is the staff member's understanding of their operational unit's/program's organizational chart and where they fit into it?
3. Who represents the staff member's operational unit/program on the Management Team?
4. What are the lines of communication within and between the agency's operational units/programs?
5. Do staff members know the philosophy, mission, goals and objectives of the agency?
6. Do staff members know the goals and objectives of their unit/program? Do staff members know how these goals and objectives fit with the goals and objectives of the agency?
7. What do staff members know about the policies and procedures of their unit/program? How do staff members learn about the policies and procedures? If staff members are not familiar with policies and procedures, do they at least know where and how to access them?
8. Are staff members familiar with the goals, objectives, policies and procedures of any units/programs other than their own? How do they acquire this knowledge about other units/programs?
9. Do staff members know how personnel policies are established and by whom?
10. Do staff members know where and how to access written personnel policies?
11. Do staff members know where and how to access personnel files?
12. Do staff members receive orientation training for their positions at the time they are hired?
13. Are staff members familiar with their job description? When and how was their job descriptions last updated?
14. Are staff members encouraged to participate in continuing education programs? Do they act on this encouragement? If not, why?
15. Are staff members encouraged to pursue professional development opportunities? Do they act on this encouragement? If not, why?

16. Do staff members have regular job performance appraisals? Who conducts the appraisals? How frequently are the job performance appraisals conducted? Are the job performance appraisals completed on time?
17. Are health department staff salaries commensurate with similar job classifications in the county?
18. Does the agency have a problem of staff turnover? Why or why not?
19. Does the agency have a problem with staff morale? Why or why not?
20. What are some problems or challenges currently being faced by the health department?

I. Representatives of Community Agencies

Purpose of the Interview

- Discuss the community agencies' partnerships with the health department (the successes and the challenges)
- Comment on the perceived value of the relationship
- Describe the formal or informal relationship regarding:
 - program goals
 - resources (staffing, funding, etc.)
 - evaluations
 - operations/representation
 - the Board of Health
- Discuss the "community" view of the Health Department
- Comment on future opportunities and the substantiality of current relationships

Sample Questions

1. What is the nature and purpose of your organization?
2. What has been the nature and duration of the health department's relationship(s) with your organization?
3. What is the health department's involvement with the community?
4. How does the health department communicate with the community? Are these means effective?
5. Does the health department communicate effectively with all racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups within the community?
6. Does the health department seek community input when developing its programs and services? From whom? How?
7. What innovativeness has the health department shown in building/supporting community coalitions?
8. How effective has the health department been in collaborating with peer agencies?
9. How effective has the health department been in promoting a public health agenda within the community?
10. What is the involvement of the Board of Health (and/or its members) in the community?
11. What is the Health Director's involvement in the community?
12. How would you describe the health department's reputation in the community?
13. What are some of the community's challenges that could/should be addressed by the health department?
14. What do you see as some of the greatest challenges currently facing the health department?