

Dynamic times call for dynamic leaders



Today's public health challenges require strong leadership, but many public health workers do not receive specific leadership training. The Northwest Center for Public Health Practice addresses this need through its Northwest Public Health Leadership Institute (NWPHLI). The NWPHLI is one of 14 regional public health leadership institutes sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The NWPHLI is a year-long training program for up-and-coming public health leaders. Our leadership scholars are dynamic public health workers who have a passion for transformational leadership. Each cohort is a mix of professionals representing urban and rural areas, as well as state, tribal, and local agencies. Since 2003, four cohorts of leadership scholars have completed the institute and fifth cohort will finish in March 2010.

As is commonly understood, the field of public health is experiencing intense—and escalating—pressures. The mandate grows while funding shrinks, and at times, external demands clash with organizational structures. Many seek out the NWPHLI to increase their leadership skills during this dynamic era.

NWCPHP provides leadership scholars with multiple ways to connect and learn during the year. Scholars attend three on-site visits, which offer an opportunity to gather in one place for instruction and face-to-face interaction with each other, faculty, and the practice community.

Because teams are so important to the culture of public health, our scholar cohorts form teams. Team members provide support and resources to each other during the year and beyond. Leadership in any field can be a lonely endeavor at times, and NWCPHP consistently receives feedback that the team experience is one of the strongest and most rewarding aspects of the institute.

Specific skill areas are team leadership, systems thinking, effective communication, and health equity, among others. The curriculum is flexible from year to year since the dynamic nature of public health requires a similar dynamism in leadership training. Innovations for the current cohort include monthly webinars that allow scholars to connect with national public health leaders.

NWCPHP acknowledges complex working environments and strives to provide training to support transformational public health leadership.



A few NWPHLI 2009-2010 scholars

Public health workers in the Pacific Northwest are able to receive leadership training at NWCPHP's Northwest Public Health Leadership Institute, which covers topics such as systems thinking and team leadership, but currently, our region does not offer a public health management program for working professionals.

In recognition of this situation, NWCPHP is teaming up with the University of North Carolina to explore whether their Management Academy for Public Health (MAPH) can be adapted to meet the needs of public health workers in the Pacific Northwest. We are also looking at other models to see if they are a good fit for the public health professionals in our region.

Informal conversations with our partners have revealed a strong interest in public health management training. NWCPHP will conduct a comprehensive needs assessment in early 2010 to better define our region's need for public health management training.

Interviews with Cindy Watts and Jeremy Sappington, former directors of the Northwest Public Health Leadership Institute, available online at www.nwcpHP.org