



ROLE-PLAY EXERCISE: CROSS-JURISDICTIONAL SHARING AND FOUNDATIONAL PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES



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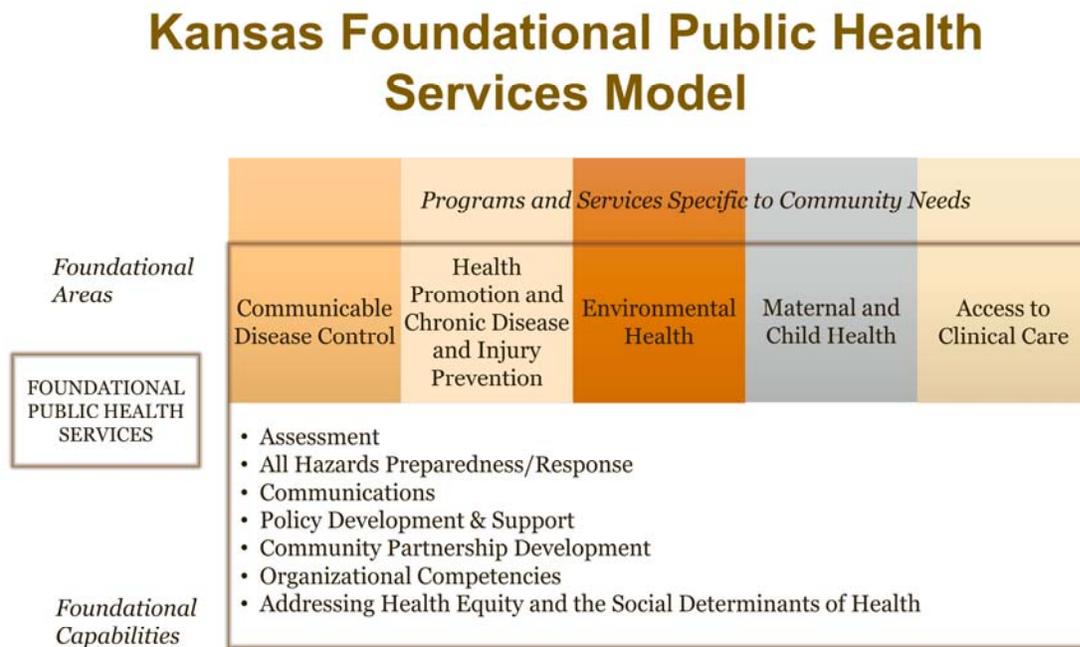
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About this Resource

This document presents a case scenario of several local health departments from fictional Kansas counties that are considering a cross-jurisdictional sharing (CJS) arrangement to enhance communications, which is one of the *Foundational Capabilities* within the Foundational Public Health Services model (*Figure 1*).

Figure 1. Kansas Foundational Public Health Services Model



Source: Kansas Public Health Systems Group, 2016.

CJS for public health services is defined as *“the deliberate exercise of public authority to enable collaboration across jurisdictional boundaries to deliver public health services and solve problems that cannot be easily solved by single organizations or jurisdictions.”*¹ While not limited to public health, CJS has emerged as a strategy to ensure that the services provided by local public health departments are efficient and effective.

¹ Center for Sharing Public Health Services. (2013). *A Roadmap to Develop Cross-Jurisdictional Sharing Initiatives*. Retrieved from <http://phsharing.org/Roadmap>

The Foundational Public Health Services (FPHS) model is the suite of skills, programs and activities that should be available in every community through state or local governmental public health agencies as basic components to keep the public safe and healthy. The FPHS are primarily population-based preventive health services that are best addressed by governmental public health. The model consists of *Foundational Capabilities* (FCs) and *Foundational Areas* (FAs). The *Foundational Capabilities* are the cross-cutting skills that need to be present everywhere for the system to work anywhere. They are the essential skills and capacities needed to support the *Foundational Areas*. *Foundational Areas* are the substantive areas of expertise or program-specific activities. Within each *Foundational Capability* and *Foundational Area*, there is a list of components that specify distinct abilities or activities for the delivery of public health services.

Role-Play Instructions

The goal of this exercise is to familiarize participants with various issues and perspectives that may arise during the development of a CJS arrangement and to provide them with questions to guide the discussion of these issues. Resources for further discussion and debrief are included at the end of the document.

During this exercise, participants will:

- Assume the role of one participant in a CJS arrangement;
- Discuss priorities and perspectives on the development of the CJS arrangement as they pertain to the assigned role;
- Decide as a group whether and how they will move forward with CJS exploration in this scenario; and
- Relate their experiences in the exercise to resources and tools developed by the Center for Sharing Public Health Services.

There are four 'roles' in this case scenario, which can be used to role-play and examine key themes in the exploration of CJS for public health services. A list of questions accompanies each role description.

The role-play can be utilized as follows.

- Each participant is assigned one role.

- Once all participants have read the assigned role description, they assume that role for the group discussion.
- Each of the participants answers the questions included in the role's *Guide for Role-Play Discussion with Your Group*, making sure to stay "in character" for their assigned role. The discussion should take approximately 15 minutes, but may take more or less time depending on the participants.
- Following the role discussion, participants may debrief using the questions on page 13. Additional resources for CJS also are listed on page 13, which may be reviewed after the role play exercise, but prior to the debrief discussion.

Figure 2. Kansas Communications Foundational Capability

Communications

The Communications capability includes activities that ensure a comprehensive communications strategy is developed and implemented.

- Ability to maintain ongoing relationships with local media outlets.
- Ability to develop and implement a strategic communications plan to articulate the agency's mission, vision, values, roles and responsibilities to the community.
- Ability to communicate the role of public health to the public and to policymakers.
- Ability to communicate specific health or public health issues through written and verbal communication tools.
- Ability to develop a communication strategy to identify a specific public health issue and/or to communicate risk (e.g., providing information on health risks, healthy behaviors and disease prevention).
- Ability to communicate in culturally and linguistically appropriate and accessible formats for various communities served, in accordance with State and Federal guidelines, such as compliance with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.
- Ability to facilitate two-way communications (transmit and receive) with the public via social media and other tools.
- Ability to develop and implement a proactive health education strategy to support good population health.

Source: Kansas Public Health Systems Group, 2016.

Role 1: Director of Arapahoe County Health Department

You are the director of Arapahoe County Health Department in Kansas, where many small, often under-funded health departments exist in close proximity to each other. Because you have a small staff of just three full-time employees (including yourself), your days are often occupied with client visits, statewide meetings and completing grant proposals and grant reports. You have discussed with other health department directors the challenge of helping the public and policymakers understand and value what public health does to keep the community safe and healthy. However—although important—this isn't something demanding urgent attention in your already-full calendar.

Recently, your state adopted a set of guidelines that emphasize the importance of the very communication strategies you think could help boost public health's visibility (*Figure 2*, page 3). But you still don't have enough staff time to do this work at your agency. You have proposed to three other health department directors (with whom you already work closely) the possibility of jointly hiring a staff member to write press releases, develop a communication plan, create messaging for health promotion and manage departmental websites, Facebook pages and Twitter accounts.

Two of your partners seem to be ready to proceed, but the director at Buffalo County Health Department is reluctant to sign a formal agreement because she is unsure how the funding will be allocated, and one of her county commissioners is concerned that Buffalo County may be responsible for a larger share of the funding and oversight than the others. Buffalo County also happens to be the largest county in the group and without their participation, it will be difficult to reach a full-time position of communication work between the potential partners.

Additionally, one of your longest-tenured staff members is unhappy with the idea of hiring a new person to write press releases and run the Facebook account. She feels that the staff members are busy enough as it is, and if a new staff person is hired, she feels that the health department should fill the billing position that was left open when the billing specialist left the health department a few years ago. The health department recently began accepting private insurance and she has been filling the role of the billing specialist. Managing all the different insurance providers is challenging and it takes away from her time serving clients, which is her passion as a public health nurse.

Despite these concerns, you are still interested in exploring whether this shared arrangement can work. These communication activities are something you will likely need to do eventually, due to the statewide focus on the issue. You also can see how it would positively impact the long-term sustainability of your health department.

Guide for Role-Play Discussion with Your Group

- Introduce yourself. What is your role? Tell a little about yourself and your job.
- Is the implementation of a communication strategy for your health department a priority for you (in your role)? Why or why not?
- Do you think there is a benefit to partnering with other counties to implement the communication strategies that were mentioned? Why or why not?
- What are some of the concerns you have about this sharing arrangement? Is there anything that would alleviate your concerns?
- What are some ways you could alleviate the concerns of others?
- What course of action could you take at this point?
- Do you want to move forward with this sharing arrangement? Why or why not?

Role 2: Director of Buffalo County Health Department

You are the director of Buffalo County Health Department in Kansas, a medium-sized health department that is surrounded by several small, often under-funded health departments. In comparison to your neighbors, your health department is doing very well; you have commissioners who generally support public health and approximately 25 staff members that have worked at the health department for an average of 15 years. You are striving to implement measures to improve the effectiveness of your health department and have recently completed your agency's strategic plan. In that strategic plan, there is an objective that relates to improving your department's communication with the public about health risks, health behaviors, disease prevention and wellness. Most of your staff members are on board with these strategies, but you have heard concerns from some staff that these activities are outside their area of expertise. You led the formation of a workforce development committee that has identified strategies for increasing the capacities of existing staff members, and this seems to have addressed most of the concerns.

Additionally, your state recently adopted a set of guidelines that emphasize the importance of the very communication strategies that are included in your strategic plan (*Figure 2*, page 3), but you don't have enough money in the budget to hire a full-time staff member. You considered hiring a part-time worker or dividing these responsibilities among your administrative staff. You have also discussed with three other health department directors the possibility of jointly hiring a full-time staff member to write press releases, develop a communication plan, create messaging for health promotion and manage departmental websites, Facebook pages and Twitter accounts.

All of the other health departments are eager to share the joint staff member, especially because they think that since your county is the largest, you'll be able to contribute most of the funds for hiring this staff member. However, you would like to spend more time planning this arrangement: Who will serve as this staff member's primary supervisor? Which county will provide the office space for the staff member? How will the office and materials costs be divided? Your commissioners support the idea of communication efforts but they share your concerns about the division of labor, and one of them is very vocal about these concerns. He has made it clear that it will not be possible to move forward until these issues are resolved.

Guide for Role-Play Discussion with Your Group

- Introduce yourself. What is your role? Tell a little about yourself and your job.
- Is the implementation of a communication strategy for your health department a priority for you (in your role)? Why or why not?
- Do you think there is a benefit to partnering with other counties to implement the communication strategies that were mentioned? Why or why not?
- What are some of the concerns you have about this sharing arrangement? Is there anything that would alleviate your concerns?
- What are some ways you could alleviate the concerns of others?
- What course of action could you take at this point?
- Do you want to move forward with this sharing arrangement? Why or why not?

Role 3: Buffalo County Commissioner

You are a county commissioner for Buffalo County in Kansas, a community of about 37,000 people that is surrounded by several much smaller and primarily agricultural counties. You have been a commissioner for six years now, and you take great pride in making decisions that ensure financial stability and quality of life for the residents of Buffalo County. Although your county has a bigger tax base than your neighboring counties, you still have to make hard choices and prioritize carefully when it comes to developing your county budget. Throughout your time as county commissioner, you have developed good relationships with your department leaders, including the director of the Buffalo County Health Department. The health department recently developed a strategic plan, and you support thinking strategically about the activities of the health department. One of the activities listed in the strategic plan is a new focus on communicating with the public about what the health department does. You think this is a good idea, because you didn't even know about the health department until after you were elected and found out you were a member of the board of health!

Your health department director has asked you for additional funds for hiring a staff member to lead the communication activities, which would include writing press releases, developing a communication plan, creating messages for health promotion and managing the health department website, Facebook page and Twitter account. Even though you are supportive of the work, you don't have enough money in the budget to add a full-time position. Given that this is ancillary to the health department's work, you think that maybe the director could hire interns from the local community college to run the social media accounts — they're probably better at it than anyone else, anyway.

Your health department director approaches you with an idea that several of the area health department directors came up with: pooling county funds to jointly hire a full-time communications staff person. While it might be a good idea in theory, you can foresee the headache that could result from all of the contracts that would be necessary to share tax dollars with other counties, and you're not convinced that the time spent developing such a legal agreement would be a good use of taxpayer money. Plus, they want Buffalo County to contribute a bigger share of the money. Even if you were to agree to that, who would be responsible for managing the staff person? And what if the other counties don't uphold their end of the bargain and you're stuck with the bill? You know that, as a policymaker, you would

ultimately be responsible for resolving any legal or financial issues if the agreement fails, and you just aren't sure it's worth the effort. You share these concerns with your colleagues and with the health department director and make it very clear that you won't even consider approving this until you have more information about how disputes would be resolved and how other counties would be held accountable.

Guide for Role-Play Discussion with Your Group

- Introduce yourself. What is your role? Tell a little about yourself and your job.
- Is the implementation of a communication strategy for your health department a priority for you (in your role)? Why or why not?
- Do you think there is a benefit to partnering with other counties to implement the communication strategies that were mentioned? Why or why not?
- What are some of the concerns you have about this sharing arrangement? Is there anything that would alleviate your concerns?
- What are some ways you could alleviate the concerns of others?
- What course of action could you take at this point?
- Do you want to move forward with this sharing arrangement? Why or why not?

Role 4: Public Health Nurse from Arapahoe County Health Department

You are a public health nurse at Arapahoe County Health Department in Kansas, which is a small, rural health department in a largely agricultural county. You have worked there for nearly 20 years, and you enjoy visiting with your clients and making a difference in their lives. However, your job is extremely busy, and has gotten much busier in recent years. You used to have four people on staff at the health department, but when the billing specialist left about two years ago and the position wasn't filled due to a budget shortage, you picked up extra responsibilities to ensure that services to the community weren't affected.

Recently, your director has been talking about hiring someone to run the Facebook account and provide marketing for the health department, but you don't feel that this is a high enough priority. You are unsure how writing press releases and managing social media is a part of public health. If a new person were to be hired, you think that they should fill the billing position that was left open. It is unclear to you why the director would want to add new responsibilities when the health department staff can barely keep up with the ones they already have. You have been doing most of the billing work, and it's something extra that's not your specialty. Plus, it's getting busier and busier now that more people are insured and the health department decided to start accepting private insurance. The biggest issue for you is that doing the billing takes you away from seeing clients, which is the part of your job that you love the most.

In addition to these concerns, you have some reservations about the concept of regionalization. You have heard of public health departments in other states that only have one brick-and-mortar building that serves several counties. If people had to travel for miles and miles to reach the health department, many people would not make the trip. Plus, your health department is small and might be swallowed up by a larger one if counties in your area were to consolidate. You can see how this decision to share one position might lead to consolidation, and how that might have negative impacts on the community, not to mention your own job security.

Guide for Role-Play Discussion with Your Group

- Introduce yourself. What is your role? Tell a little about yourself and your job.
- Is the implementation of a communication strategy for your health department a priority for you (in your role)? Why or why not?
- Do you think there is a benefit to partnering with other counties to implement the communication strategies that were mentioned? Why or why not?
- What are some of the concerns you have about this sharing arrangement? Is there anything that would alleviate your concerns?
- What are some ways you could alleviate the concerns of others?
- What course of action could you take at this point?
- Do you want to move forward with this sharing arrangement? Why or why not?

One Possible Course of Action

Though there is no one 'correct' solution to the scenario described, the participants may be curious whether their course of action was appropriate, given the scenario. One way that the fictional characters could have approached this scenario follows.

Because the health departments in the region are mostly small, there is a strong case to be made for the economies of scale that could be realized through sharing services. However, some of the resistance to the communication activities may indicate that there are needs in other areas. The group could decide to examine a different topic or service to share, perhaps one that already exists, but may have low staffing and capacity. The group could use self-assessment tools (http://phsharing.org/assessment_tools/) on the Center for Sharing Public Health Services' website to determine which service might be the best fit for sharing.

Sharing a service that already exists within the health departments could eliminate the need to hire a new person, since the skills and expertise are already in place at the health departments; however, depending on how the existing activity is configured, there may be differing reactions from staff and other stakeholders. Some staff may be relieved to offload additional responsibilities, while others may be threatened by the fact that someone else is taking their job. Conducting a series of meetings with key stakeholders, including staff, policymakers and other community providers, could provide more insights into the different perspectives on the shared service. This is also a good opportunity for the partners to outline consistent messages for stakeholders about the goals and intended outcomes of the service sharing, including how CJS would contribute to more effective and efficient public health.

Additionally, the concerns about funding and managerial responsibilities should be addressed. Conducting a cost study and exploring model CJS agreements or the Center's legal checklist (<http://phsharing.org/LegalChecklist>) could help to identify mutually agreeable approaches to the funding and structure of the potential arrangement before moving forward.

As noted, this is just one possible approach to addressing some of the concerns stated in the role descriptions. Other solutions are possible, and participants are encouraged to seek technical assistance from Center staff as well as to use creativity and local knowledge about what would be feasible in each community.

Questions for Debrief

The following questions may be used for debriefing with the group that participated in the exercise. The debrief is designed to happen immediately after the group has completed the role-play exercise. Along with the debrief questions, there are some linked resources that may assist in the discussion. The person leading the exercise may consider sharing hard copies of the resources with the participants and providing some time for reviewing these resources prior to the debrief discussion. The group may use some, all or none of the debrief questions, depending on the amount of time available and the particular interests of the group.

- Which parts of the case scenario ring true to your experiences in your current (real life) work?
- Which of the success factors (<http://phsharing.org/SuccessFactors>) were present in your group? Which were not present?
- In which stage of the *CJS Roadmap* (<http://phsharing.org/Roadmap>) is your group?
- Where would the potential agreement fall on the *CJS Spectrum* (<http://phsharing.org/Spectrum>)?
- One of the main issues here is funding for the service. What types of funding structures (<http://phsharing.org/Costs>) might work for this group?
- Another concern is the decision-making process. The following document can help you think through some of these important issues: <http://phsharing.org/LegalChecklist>.
- If this scenario was happening in your current (real life) position, how would you proceed?

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