Handbook on Core Competencies Distributed to All Local and State Health Departments
Disseminating a handbook on improving the public health system

**SUMMARY**

In 2002, the Center for Public Health Practice of the Rollins School of Public Health at Emory University, Atlanta, disseminated *The Public Health Competency Handbook: Optimizing Individual and Organizational Performance for the Public’s Health*, which outlines the critical competencies needed by public health agencies to put newly defined performance standards into practice.

The *Handbook* also assists health departments in tailoring these competencies to their local situation.

**Key Results**

- The Rollins School disseminated 2,510 copies of *The Public Health Competency Handbook* to all local and state health departments in May 2002. The distribution accompanied the release of the National Public Health Performance Standards.

- The project team also disseminated the *Handbook* to all participants at the National Health Performance Standards Summit held in June 2002.

- The project team made presentations at the National Association of City and County Health Officials in July 2002 and other meetings.

**Funding**


**THE PROBLEM**

A 1988 Institute of Medicine report, *The Future of Public Health*, critically assessed the status of public health in the U.S. and found that the nation's public health system lacked the capacity to accomplish national public health goals. This report gave rise to a new awareness of the core functions of public health and its focus on health and prevention. In
response, there was significant interest in strengthening the public health infrastructure, specifically, public health agency capacity, workforce, data and information systems.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other public health organizational partners initiated the National Public Health Performance Standards Program, a quality improvement tool to foster change and provide guidance for public health system enhancement at the state and community levels.

*The Public Health Competency Handbook* was based on research funded under a multi-year cooperative agreement between the CDC and the Association of Schools of Public Health. The *Handbook* seeks to assist state and local health departments as they build and strengthen competencies needed to put the National Public Health Performance Standards into practice, and to help public health agencies optimize individual and organizational performance. The 276-page hands-on guide is divided into four sections:

- **Part 1**—"Why This? Why Now?" an overview of the nation's public health system in transition.
- **Part 2**—"Introducing the Seven Competency Areas," an examination of the seven organizational competency areas by organizational level and practice setting.
- **Part 3**—"Walking the Talk," with strategies and tools for institutionalizing organizational competencies.
- **Part 4**—"Where the Rubber Meets the Road," a section on competency-based performance management.

Appendices contain extensive resources for each section. An accompanying CD-ROM contains supporting materials.

**THE PROJECT**

With RWJF funding, the Rollins School disseminated 2,510 copies of *The Public Health Competency Handbook* to all local and state health departments in May 2002; the distribution accompanied the release of the National Public Health Performance Standards. The project team also disseminated the Handbook to all participants at the National Health Performance Standards Summit held in June 2002.

The project team made presentations at the National Association of City and County Health Officials in July 2002 and other meetings. The *Handbook* can be purchased at the Public Health Foundation website. A website to support the *Handbook* including related topics, resources and training materials can be found online.
AFTERWARD

The co-authors of the *Handbook* continue to consult with and train state and local health departments to use the *Handbook* and its competency-based and systems approach.

Prepared by: Karyn Collins  
Reviewed by: Robert Narus and Molly McKaughan  
Program Officer: Laura C. Leviton  
Grant ID # 44484

BIBLIOGRAPHY

*(Current as of date of the report; as provided by the grantee organization; not verified by RWJF; items not available from RWJF.)*

Books