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Early Activities for Public Health PBRNs

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EARLY ACTIVITIES FOR PUBLIC HEALTH PBRNS

Formalize an organizational structure for your network. Develop a charter and/or memorandum of agreement that details the network's mission, vision, and values; states short-term and long-term objectives; specifies the composition of key governing, advisory, and decision-making bodies; details procedures for collective decision-making within the network; and outlines roles and responsibilities of the key network partners/participants.

Develop initial communication channels and mechanisms. Establish and disseminate a list of key contacts and contact information; develop a schedule for recurring meetings and conference calls; identify channels for ad hoc and informal communication (e.g. listservs, other meetings where subgroups of network members convene, etc).

Inventory research interests of participants. Identify the universe of initial research interests held by network participants; identify interests held in common by subgroups of participants; examine the correspondence between research interests identified by practitioners and researchers within the network; examine the correspondence between network research interests and the research priorities articulated by major public health research funding agencies.

Scan for research opportunities in the local policy & practice environment. Identify emerging or planned activities/interventions that may create compelling opportunities for comparison, investigation, or evaluation. Examples may include natural experiments created by changes in law or policy, changes in funding or other resources, reorganization, new or emerging public health risks/threats, developments in the public health workforce, etc. Look for developments that create variation in exposure to a particular stimulus in the public health practice environment, yielding opportunities for comparison and tracking of responses and outcomes over time. What can be learned from such events, what causal mechanisms could be tested, how could the counterfactual be observed or estimated (i.e. what happens in the absence of the stimulus), and how might results generalize to other practice settings?

Inventory research resources and assets within your network: Identify current or potential data sources maintained by network participants (e.g. surveillance systems, administrative records, etc), and inventory key areas of expertise of network members (e.g. data systems and informatics, research design, data collection methods, data analysis techniques, participatory research approaches, research protocol development and IRB/human subjects protection, etc).

Plan a small-scale research project to engage the network and show proof of concept. Look for a project that touches a common issue of interest to network members, that will allow multiple members to be involved, and that capitalizes on existing resources and assets. Such projects may rely on existing data and may be descriptive or exploratory in nature, helping network members learn to work together and elucidate issues and questions that may be suitable for subsequent, more in-depth inquiry.

Identify technical assistance needs. Identify areas of expertise needed by your network to accomplish its early development and research activities that may not exist among network participants. The National Coordinating Center can help you identify external sources of assistance in these areas – from other networks and/or other experts. .