# Interview Protocol: Governmental Public Health Staff and Foundational Capabilities

## *Final Protocol for Phase II*

### 1. Introduction

* As a reminder, we’ll be recording this interview and will also be taking notes. The recordings and notes will only be used for this project, seen only by project team members, and we will not quote anyone directly – either verbally or in any publicly released or distributed documents.
* As we talk through the issues, we ask that you answer the questions through the lens of your entire health department. Further, we want to hear how/if you think about these things and what your opinions are, and there are no right or wrong answers. “I don’t know” is a perfectly informative answer as well. Again, we’ll keep your responses anonymous.
* Any questions?

### 2. Activities of the Health Department

* In two or three sentences, can you tell us what your job as health officer (or senior deputy, etc.) generally entails?
* Thinking about your health department as a whole, what are the *three* most important activities/programs/services that your health department uniquely does or provides, that no one else in your community does or could do?
* What are the *three* most significant *unmet* needs that you’d like your health department to address to improve your community’s health?
* What would you say are the essential skills that staff in your health department need to conduct their work effectively?

*Now we’d like to talk about some of the activities and services your department currently does or does not provide.*

* Thinking about the programs/services of your health department, could you generally put them into three categories? Those that you’d say are “truly necessary,” those that are “nice to have, but largely optional,” and those that you think you could do away with?
  + Let’s start with “truly necessary.”
  + How about those that are “nice-to-have but are largely “optional?”
  + What programs or activities that you have now would you do away with if you could? (Make sure to prompt on this – to (1) get answer and (2) get why)
  + Thinking about those that you said were “truly necessary.” are there any that you might identify as more or less important than the others?
* What additional programs/services would you *add* if you were not limited by financial, legal, political, or other constraints?
  + (Follow up:) Would that be a wholly new activity or just an increase in effort?
    - (Add’l follow up to increased effort:) Are there any new programs you’d add rather than just increase your effort on these existing programs if these constraints didn’t exist?
    - (Add’l follow up to new activities:) Would you increase your effort in any existing programs if these constraints didn’t exist?
* What would you say is the relative amount of time and attention that your health department dedicates to public health/population-based health activities versus providing clinical services?
  + Do you feel this is the right balance? (If yes, why? If not, why not)
  + Do you think this will change with the implementation of health reform?

### 3. Foundational Capabilities

*Now we’d like to talk a little bit about the concept of foundational capabilities for all governmental public health departments. By foundational capabilities, we’re referring to those cross cutting capacities that support all programs and activities a health department conducts and delivers.*

* To start, are you familiar with this term/concept?
  + (If yes:) Would you define it in the same or a slightly different way?
  + (If no:) Based on the definition we shared, would you or do you call it something else?
* If it were up to you, what sort of cross cutting capacities might you identify as a foundational capability?
  + (Follow up on each:) Does your health department currently possess this foundational capability? How is it funded? Is it generally shared across your programs/activities or is it “owned” by one particularly part of the department?

*Great, this has been really helpful. Now, let me now share with you a list of foundational capabilities that some individual states have come up with. For each, I’d like to talk about whether your health department has this capability and why it may or may not be important to your work on a daily basis – in other words, whether it seems to you to be “foundational.”*

*(Do not give examples unless they need a prompt.)*

* **Assessment (Surveillance and epi)**
  + Would you say your health department has this?
    - IF YES:
      * Is it shared across your programs/activities or is it “owned” by one particular part of the department?
      * How is it funded?
      * How does this capability contribute to your community’s health?
    - IF NO:
      * Does someone else in your community have this capability to meet the health needs of those you serve – how so?
      * If you had this capability, how would it address your community’s health needs?
* **Communications (appropriately way/channels, two way comm., across all sectors/stakeholders)**
  + Would you say your health department has this?
    - IF YES:
      * Is it shared across your programs/activities or is it “owned” by one particular part of the department?
      * How is it funded?
      * How does this capability contribute to your community’s health?
    - IF NO:
      * Does someone else in your community have this capability to meet the health needs of those you serve – how so?
      * If you had this capability, how would it address your community’s health needs?
* **Policy development and support**
  + Would you say your health department has this?
    - IF YES:
      * Is it shared across your programs/activities or is it “owned” by one particular part of the department?
      * How is it funded?
      * How does this capability contribute to your community’s health?
    - IF NO:
      * Does someone else in your community have this capability to meet the health needs of those you serve – how so?
      * If you had this capability, how would it address your community’s health needs?
* **Community partnership development (CBOs, HC, and other non health sectors)**
  + Would you say your health department has this?
    - IF YES:
      * Is it shared across your programs/activities or is it “owned” by one particular part of the department?
      * How is it funded?
      * How does this capability contribute to your community’s health?
    - IF NO:
      * Does someone else in your community have this capability to meet the health needs of those you serve – how so?
      * If you had this capability, how would it address your community’s health needs?
* **Budgeting and Money Management** 
  + Would you say your health department has this?
    - IF YES:
      * Is it shared across your programs/activities or is it “owned” by one particular part of the department?
      * How is it funded?
      * How does this capability contribute to your community’s health?
    - IF NO:
      * Does someone else in your community have this capability to meet the health needs of those you serve – how so?
      * If you had this capability, how would it address your community’s health needs?
* **Quality assurance/improvement (CQI, accreditation, IDing/using evidence based practices)**
  + Would you say your health department has this?
    - IF YES:
      * Is it shared across your programs/activities or is it “owned” by one particular part of the department?
      * How is it funded?
      * How does this capability contribute to your community’s health?
    - IF NO:
      * Does someone else in your community have this capability to meet the health needs of those you serve – how so?
      * If you had this capability, how would it address your community’s health needs?
* **Workforce Development**
  + Would you say your health department has this?
    - IF YES:
      * Is it shared across your programs/activities or is it “owned” by one particular part of the department?
      * How is it funded?
      * How does this capability contribute to your community’s health?
    - IF NO:
      * Does someone else in your community have this capability to meet the health needs of those you serve – how so?
      * If you had this capability, how would it address your community’s health needs?
    - REMINDER to probe on this topic in particular!
* **Information technology, management, and analysis (both the infrastructure to support this and the capacity to analyze data)**
  + Would you say your health department has this?
    - IF YES:
      * Is it shared across your programs/activities or is it “owned” by one particular part of the department?
      * How is it funded?
      * How does this capability contribute to your community’s health?
    - IF NO:
      * Does someone else in your community have this capability to meet the health needs of those you serve – how so?
      * If you had this capability, how would it address your community’s health needs?
    - REMINDER to probe on infrastructure vs. informatics and more deeply on informatics.
* **Legal support (regulations, knowing what one’s HD can and cannot do)**
  + Would you say your health department has this?
    - IF YES:
      * Is it shared across your programs/activities or is it “owned” by one particular part of the department?
      * How is it funded?
      * How does this capability contribute to your community’s health?
    - IF NO:
      * Does someone else in your community have this capability to meet the health needs of those you serve – how so?
      * If you had this capability, how would it address your community’s health needs?
* Are there other cross-cutting capabilities that we’ve missed?
  + Would you say your health department has this?
    - IF YES:
      * Is it shared across your programs/activities or is it “owned” by one particular part of the department?
      * How is it funded?
      * How does this capability contribute to your community’s health?
    - IF NO:
      * Does someone else in your community have this capability to meet the health needs of those you serve – how so?
      * If you had this capability, how would it address your community’s health needs?
* From the list we’ve discussed and/or those you’ve added, what would you say are the most important foundational capabilities to support your work?
* How would you distinguish between a foundational capability and an essential service?

### 4. Funding, and Programmatic Support

*We now would like to talk about funding and programmatic support for your health department.*

* Is most of your funding “categorical” or do you have a fair amount of flexibility in your funding streams?
  + So where do those more flexible dollars come from, and what do they allow you to do that categorical funding might not?
* Has your funding been increased, reduced, or stayed about the same in the last year?
  + By approximately how much?
  + Are these cuts/increases mostly due to federal funds, or state and local as well?
    - (If increased:) What have you used these additional funds for?
    - (If cut: )Have programs been eliminated, or have you mostly seen across the board cuts, i.e. a percentage of your budget?
* Do you think current funding structures lead to effective and efficient delivery of activities/services to the public?
  + Why or why not?
* Thinking specifically about the list of foundational capabilities we discussed, from your point of view, what would be the ideal way to fund them? (Reflect back on the list if needed, i.e. – for example, policy development, you mentioned you fund it by xx… would there be a better or more efficient way to do this?)
* How do you go about prioritizing services and activities in your health department?
  + Are there specific criteria you use?
  + Do you use formal decision-making tools?

### 5. Wrap Up

* Thinking back over our discussion, do you have any additional thoughts regarding the foundational capabilities concept, or is there anything else you’d like to share with us regarding the topics we’ve discussed?