

# Staffing Up: Determining Public Health Workforce Ratios Needed to Serve the Nation Data Collection

## Technical Assistance Plan

Staffing Up | October 2022

---

### Background and Purpose

“Staffing Up: Determining Public Health Workforce Ratios Needed to Serve the Nation” (“Staffing Up”) is a partnership between the de Beaumont Foundation and the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB) and its subsidiary the Public Health National Center for Innovations (PHNCI) to develop a national estimate of the staffing needed to fully implement a minimum package of public health services, the Foundational Public Health Services (FPHS) across the United States. These estimates are intended to support efforts to ensure sufficient funding for the public health system in the United States (US).

### Staffing Up UCOA Data Collection Process

#### Scope and Participation

The UW PHAST UCOA’s team’s data collection for Staffing Up is intended to generate additional sample data around state and local public health agencies’ current implementation, spending on, and full cost of implementing FPHS. These data will help support the development of a calculator for use by all individual state and local public health agencies in estimating their costs for fully implementing FPHS.

The existing sample includes 168 local health departments from four decentralized states (37 in Colorado, 76 in Ohio, 30 in Oregon, and 25 in Washington) as well as three state health agencies (Colorado, Oregon, and Washington). Additional data is desired from state and local governmental public health agency data from at least two centralized, shared, or mixed governance US states and additional local public health agency data from large LPHAs would be needed to accomplish those tasks. These public health agencies will be asked to provide estimates for current spending and FTE dedicated to providing the activities in the UCOA operational definitions. For agencies in which the FPHS are new or not fully implemented, participants will be asked to estimate the resources it would take to fully implement these services.

Connected to the difference between resources currently spent and resources needed, the assessment will collect qualitative data regarding the current ability of governmental public health agencies to provide FPHS. More specifically, participants will be asked to assess their current capacity and expertise to provide each FPHS activity. Participants will be asked to rate these two factors separately in recognition that there is a difference between the knowledge (expertise) and the resources (capacity) needed to provide a service. In other words, there are some services where the organization has the expertise or knowledge to provide a service, but may not have the resources (see Table 1, Matrix example 1), and that there are some services where the organization may have flexibility in resources but does not currently have the required training (see Table 1, Matrix example 2).

Table 1: Matrix of FPHS Expertise and Capacity

Expertise (Knowledge)	Capacity (Resources)	
	<u>High</u>	<u>Low</u>
<u>High</u>		Example 1
<u>Low</u>	Example 2	

## Data Collection

### Data Collection Instrument

The UW PHAST UCOA Team will develop a customizable data collection instrument for state and local public health agencies to allocate, record, and report data related to all of their activities, as defined by the UCOA Operational Definitions, inclusive of the activities of the function of public health. This instrument collects consistent data across all participants with interfaces customized for individual participants based on the complexity of their accounting data and conformity of their chart of accounts to the UCOA. The data collection instrument will be developed using Microsoft Excel Online and hosted on Microsoft SharePoint, which have the benefits of being able to run on browsers found on most computers, preventing the instrument from needing to be saved locally, and ensuring that all respondents can access the instrument regardless of their software.

The data collection instrument will be designed with the end user in mind. The UW PHAST UCOA Team staff have extensive experience designing data collection instruments that emphasize usability, with strong wayfinding and appropriate level of detail for public health practitioners. There is likely to be a wide range of respondents, with both state and LPHA participants, and LPHAs that serve varying populations. To optimize participation, we will customize data collection tools to scale LPHAs level of effort to the time and resources they have available.

#### *Piloting*

Working with a small group of participants and the project team, The UW PHAST UCOA Team will share a Beta version of the data collection instrument to seek feedback on its usability. A small group of state and LPHAs, ideally reflecting the diversity of the participant pool, will review and provide feedback on this beta data collection instrument in a workshop setting. The group will be selected by the project group based on availability and characteristics, such as size and geographic location. The beta test participants will not be asked to complete the instrument but to comment on usability and ability to respond. The beta test will occur in two stages:

1. First, we'll host a one-hour orientation where we'll review the assessment tool structure and the process for collecting programmatic self-assessment of current implementation, current spending, and full implementation cost (and all other) data for one Core Service or Capability.

As part of this meeting, participants will be provided access to a "beta" data collection instrument, that they can explore ahead of a focus group meeting the following week.

2. Second, we'll host a series of one-hour interviews/focus groups with subsets (based on state and LPHA characteristics, like size) of the volunteer state and LPHAs. During this meeting, beta testers will have an opportunity to provide valuable feedback on the data collection instrument, including what works well and what needs to be improved.

The UW PHAST UCOA Team will make every effort to integrate the feedback received during this pilot into the final data collection instrument

## Completing the Data Collection Instrument

### *Recruitment and Engagement*

To streamline this, we will first identify a principal contact at each participating state and LPHA.

### *Outreach*

To get as near to a 100% completion rate as possible, early and comprehensive outreach to participants will be vital. This principal contact will be included on all outreach and be the primary channel of communication between the UW PHAST UCOA team and respondents; however, the UW PHAST UCOA team will include additional participants from each agency as requested.

Outreach will have two primary purposes:

- **Inform broad stakeholders of the assessment** to support understanding of the key challenges related to assessing and costing public health services and message the expected outcomes, including limitations, of this process.
- **Provide key assessment information**, including the purpose, schedule, roles and responsibilities, and key milestones.

Opportunities to communicate the importance of the UCOA's data collection effort include an announcement from high-level officials. Following the general announcement, each LPHA will receive an introduction email from the UW PHAST UCOA Team that includes a general explanation of the process, basic instructions to log on to the UCOA Staffing Up Data Collection-specific website (hosted via SharePoint), information for providing initial data and scheduling an orientation, and next steps, such as the dates of orientation webinars.

### *Comprehensive Technical Assistance*

Given the variety of participants, key to the success of this assessment is comprehensive and engaged technical assistance. Technical assistance helps to ensure that state and LPHAs are able to complete their UCOA data collection instruments as easily and efficiently as possible and to ensure high-quality data.

To that end, The UW PHAST UCOA Team will work with the project team to provide an array of technical assistance resources throughout the FPHS assessment. Outreach and the pilot feedback process are specific forms of early technical assistance; additional technical assistance will include at a minimum:

### **Passive Technical Assistance Resources**

- A [webpage](#) was created as part of the PHAST website on which project materials will be easily accessible to LPHA respondents. In addition to providing a centralized library of assistance resources, the 2019 FPHS Assessment website will also allow The UW PHAST UCOA Team to correct identified issues with tools, view completion progress, and work concurrently with LPHAs through problems in their individual tools.

- **Assessment Process Resources** that provide process-related technical assistance materials: for instance, a handout outlining the technical assistance process, schedule, and resources. Contextual information related to the assessment process, such as the completed operational definition manual, will be included on the 2019 FPHS Assessment website.
- The [UCOA Operational Definitions Manual](#) allows participants to work through the materials at their own pace and find answers to questions when they need them.
- A [Concise Guide to the Uniform Chart of Accounts](#) – a quick reference to aid in reporting on FTE, expenditures, and revenues.

### Active Technical Assistance Resources

- **Ongoing Communications to principal contacts** about the FPHS assessment process, announce new assistance resources available, schedule webinars, and provide reminders regarding milestones and deadlines.
- An **Orientation Webinar** will be recorded and made available on the Staffing Up webpage to all state and LPHA staff who may be participating in the FPHS assessment at any point. The orientation webinar will provide a high-level overview of the assessment process, a walk through the assessment tool, and an introduction to the UCOA website. There will also be substantial live question and answer periods with each state and LPHA to allow state and LPHAs to ask questions about the assessment process after viewing the recorded webinar.
- **Individual Assistance** by videoconference, phone and/or email to respond to questions and issues during state and LPHAs' completion of the assessment tool. An email address will be created specifically for this purpose; all emails will receive a response with a time limit, tentatively set at one business day. Questions may be answered via videoconference, email or phone conversations scheduled with The UW PHAST UCOA Team staff.
- **One-on-One and Live Technical Assistance Sessions** (like open office hours) provided to state and LPHA cohorts and individually in response to group questions or issues that cannot be solved through typical individual assistance. These sessions will generally be conducted by phone conference with a shared screen, and may include multiple staff members and project team representatives as needed.
- **Ad Hoc Topic Webinars** responding to identified issues on an as needed basis. In previous FPHS assessments, examples have included webinars on estimating and allocating limited resources that was targeted to state and LPHAs serving smaller populations with limited budgets.

Some of the technical assistance activities described above will be ongoing in the sense that they will occur throughout the entire project, such as the one-on-one assistance sessions. Other activities are targeted and will occur at specific times during the data collection process, such as the orientation webinar.

### Data Validation

The technical assistance process is designed to assure that state and LPHAs have a shared understanding of implementation of FPHS and that they have the necessary information to provide reasonably accurate data. Prior efforts in other states have shown that while there will be some amount of random error from respondents, there will also be unexpected findings that represent valid outliers. Validation is the effort of separating errors from outliers. To do this, we'll do a quick consistency check on the results, including:

- **Internal consistency (at the respondent level):** are the responses from each LPHA internally consistent? For example, do the labor costs make sense given the number of estimated FTE? Can an LPHA that needs 10 FTE for one foundational program only need 0.5 FTE for another foundational program?
- **Overall assessment consistency (across and among respondents):** are the estimates reasonably aligned among LPHAs? If every LPHA reported needing \$25,000 or more to fully implement an element, could an LPHA serving 100,000 people need \$2,500?

The consistency check represents data cleaning, which will narrow our list of actual outliers. After that check, we'll do a deeper dive of those inconsistencies that were confirmed by LPHAs and represent actual outliers to understand the nature of and logic behind them. For example:

- Why are the estimates inconsistent? Do they represent a difference in demand drivers or are they related to how, to what extent, or with what expertise work is being performed?
- Is the result possible? For example, if a LPHA provides an extremely low estimate for a particular element, are they accounting for realistic costs for the resources they need to do that work?
- Are the estimates consistent with other system- or agency-level data (for example ASTHO, NACCHO, or Public Health Wins data)?

When issues are identified through one of these methods, validation efforts will include reaching out to representatives from individual LPHAs to request information about apparent outlying data. For errors, The UW PHAST UCOA Team will assist the LPHA to estimate corrected data. Validation ensures that data are usable and LPHAs understand both their own and the overall final results and the implications of those results.