

## What are NC Health Directors sharing with County Commissioners?

### Ongoing Updates

- Annual state of public health update; annual written report
- Quarterly staff presentation about a health department programs
- Monthly updates on major issues
- Weekly reports regarding health department activities
- Ongoing public health priorities and activities
  - Health status updates
  - Strategic plan
  - BT Preparedness
  - Program and/or project updates
  - Legislative needs/initiatives
  - Environmental health

### Response to Community Concerns and Current Issues

- Public health updates and concerns in the media (e.g. pandemic flu – and what you are doing to address it)
- Current local issues –
  - Vaccine shortages
  - Outbreak investigations
  - Environmental health backlogs
  - Community health assessment data
  - New ordinances
  - Uncompensated care data
- Issues that county commissioners may receive questions or complaints about from the community

### Policy & Financial Approval and Issues

- Budget and finances
  - Purchases and expenditure requests
  - Budget defense and changes
  - Fee changes
- Proposed and current policy changes
- Personnel issues
  - Creating new positions
  - Updates and reclassification
- Respond to their questions & concerns

### Other

- Board of Health updates, actions, and invitations to meetings
- Request permission for involvement in regional activities
- Anything that needs their approval
- Event invitations and thank you notes

## How are they doing it?

Health Directors that participated in this survey use a variety of methods to communicate with their commissioners. Often the method depends on the type of information they need to share and whether they are presenting information they select, or responding to community/commissioner concerns. Many health directors report using multiple methods of

information sharing to make sure that they cover all of their bases and commissioner communication preferences.

**Helpful Hints & Questions:**

- How do your County Commissioners prefer to receive routine updates?
- How does your County Manager prefer you communicate to the Commissioners?
- Clarify the role of your BOH/CC representative. What will they report to commissioners and what are they leaving up to you?
- Provide ongoing updates as well as timely response to issues and concerns

**STANDING MEETINGS & EVENTS.** Some HD attend meetings regularly, while others attend only when requested

Examples	Benefits to this approach
Annual health department retreat	gives opportunity to showcase the department
Community forum; State of the County forums <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff presentations</li> <li>• Health Director update</li> </ul>	(1) Gives commissioners a chance to get to know the staff; more effective than giving them a sheet of paper with a program description (2) Provides comprehensive information and data in an environment that promotes dialogue
Joint BOH/County Commissioner meeting	
Presentation at commissioner meetings	(1) Simple and direct (2) All board meetings are televised – so it is a great way to educate the public in addition to presenting information to the commissioners

**Proactive UPDATES & Reactive RESPONSE** – keeps commissioners apprised of issues, and allows for frequent interaction outside of structured meetings; it is personable – builds personal relationships and trust. It is important to share information as much as possible.

Examples	Benefits to this approach
Individual Emails	(1) Gives facts and figures that CC can refer back to when citizens have questions (2) Quick and direct
Through the county list-serve	(1) Information is reaches multiple audiences
Phone calls	(1) Can discuss complex issues, make sure they understand, and answer questions; (2) Can discuss potentially controversial issues one-on-one before presentation in a larger gathering (3) BOH members can make personal calls to bring attention to important issues (4) can address subjects one-on-one that are of particular interested to certain commissioners
Communicate through the county manager	(1) Keeps County manager included and informed (2) Information goes out in a manager’s memo (3) Some Commissioner boards may prefer that information go through the County Manager – and not directly to the commissioners

Lunch meetings	(1) establishes personal relationships outside of the office (2) creates opportunities to discuss personal opinions and concerns about community issues, health-related and otherwise
Through BOH and/or BOH designated commissioner • Present info to BOH and commissioner member shares with BOC	(1) He or she understands questions and concerns typically raised by other county commissioners (2) He or she knows how to present information in an effective manner
Informal discussions at other local committee meetings and events (civic clubs, church, etc.)	(1) Can address issues or concerns that county commissioners may feel uncomfortable addressing at public meetings (2)

The setting of the encounter will often dictate the presentation format – such that health directors chose what they think will be most effective for a particular setting. Use a variety of methods based on the information being presented and the formality needed.

- Printed materials and content – can be shared in many ways and may include:
  - Written summaries
  - Written report
  - Presentation handouts
  - Graphics
  - Data/statistics
  - Fiscal reports
  - Local Print Media
- Presentation Tools
  - PowerPoint presentations
  - Reports
  - Newspaper Articles

### **RELATIONSHIP BUILDING**

*“I feel it is critical for the ‘health’ of the entire Health Department for the health director to have a good relationship with the county manager and commissioners. However, I also realize that cannot always be easy, especially with some of the issues, rules, statues, etc. I do feel that responding in a positive, quick, and informational way can encourage a good relationship, even if neither really agrees with the response.”*

*“Don’t talk to them only when asking for something”*

*“I attend every Board of Commissioner’s meeting. They have all developed a relationship with me and respect my opinion. I show a continued interest in what is going on in the government of [my] County. I send thank you letters when they support a public health initiative and invite them to all our activities.”*

*“Most officials hate to be surprise. I always let the county manager know if I see a problem coming from the community. I figure the first version of the story they hear will be the one that sticks.”*

### **ADVOCACY**

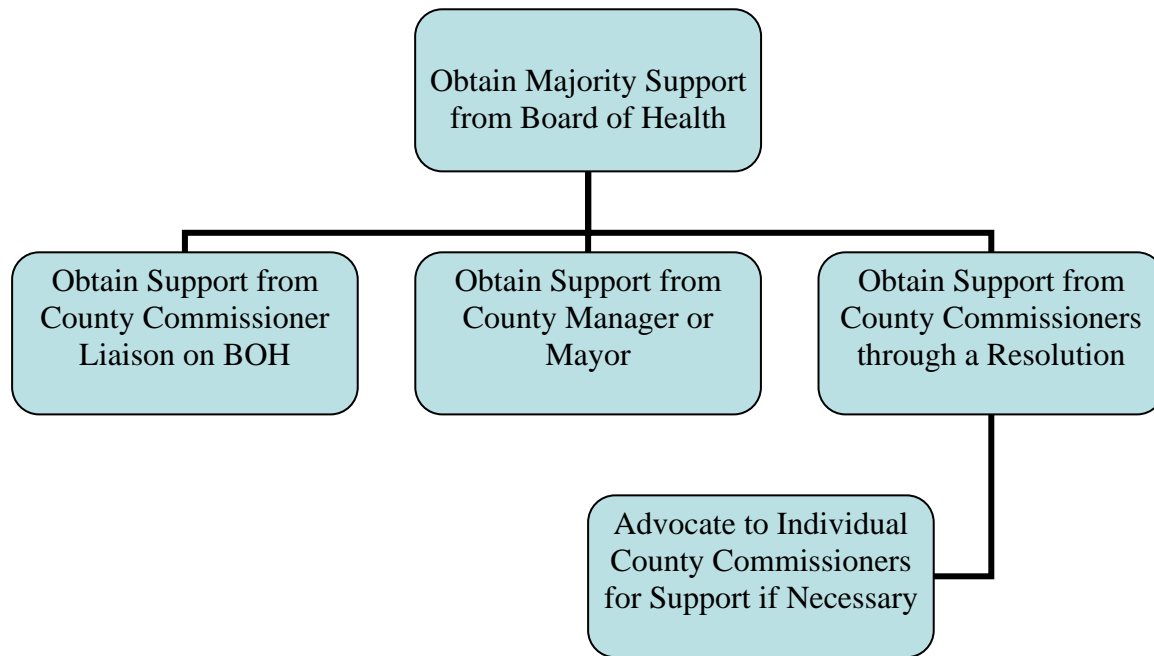
*“Each opportunity to educate is one more step of influencing for public health.”*

## How are NC Health Directors Receiving Financial Support from County Commissioners?

The following list highlights when North Carolina health directors are most likely to ask for financial support from county commissioners:

1. During budget season only
2. When support from the boards of health are strong for a particular issue or service
3. When the service or issue directly affects the advancement of the health departments' strategic plan
4. When issues or services are mandated and unfunded by the State
5. When evidence from community health assessments indicate a strong need for a specific service.

What are the first steps to receiving financial support from county commissioners?



How are NC Health Directors ranking issues in terms of importance?

**Public Health Impact → Financial Capabilities → Community Interests**

## How are they asking for financial support?

Health directors participating in this survey used a variety of methods to determine which projects, services or issues they will ask county commissioners' for their financial support. These methods were based on what policies and procedures are currently used and recommended by the Board of Commissioners. Many health directors report the county commissioners only consider financial allocations once a year during the budget season. It is clear most health directors believe obtaining financial support is a collaborative effort between themselves, board of health members, county managers, finance directors, and county commissioners.

### Helpful Hints & Questions:

- Start with the board of health representative, because he or she knows the types of questions and concerns other county commissioners will have about financial requests.
- Always follow the budget process.
- Do your homework—provide a thoughtful, accurate proposal for additional funding.
- Send as much budget information as possible to county commissioners before meetings.
- What community services are most important to county commissioners?

Examples	Benefits to this approach
BOH members works as an advocate for the health department to county commissioners	(1) Creates collaboration between health department and county commissioners. (2) Foresight of board of health/county commissioner liaison helps anticipate questions/concerned that might be raised at the commissioners' meeting.
Through the budget process	(1) This is when county commissioners make appropriations to all agencies. (2) County commissioners are not surprised by sudden requests, because the budget is process-oriented.
Through proposals or resolutions	(1) Makes the information personal (2) County commissioners are informed prior to the meeting about budget requests and have time to review the information. (3) Gives county commissioners time to directly speak with health directors about the budget requests and ask questions. (4) County commissioners have time to do their own research about the service, project, etc. before making a final decision.
Phone Calls or meetings	(1) Personal contact to address commissioners concerns and create positive outcomes.
Support of County Manager and/or Finance Director	(1) They can see how the strategic plan is being impacted by the budget allocations, i.e. what has been achieved and what has not. (2) County manager or finance director can offer additional support if requests are being

	made for unfunded mandates. (3) Can make a case for how additional funding for the health department can/will benefit multiple agencies.
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**FINANCIAL SUPPORT**

*"I think it is important to understand the philosophy of the commissioners individually and as a board to the extent possible then identify those subjects that are most pressing in terms of departmental and community needs. There is no point in approaching a subject they are already predisposed to reject."*

*"Be sure that the commissioner representative on the Board of Health is well-informed and supportive. If possible, speak with individual commissioners prior to the meeting."*

*"I always write a detailed narrative with financial projections, if necessary, and send it out with their board packet for the next meeting. This gives them an opportunity to review the information prior to the meeting."*

*"Ask only for important things—stick to your purpose so your credibility remains intact."*

**Who or What Influences the Actions of County Commissioners in NC?**

It is clear health directors understand county commissioners are being tugged on from every direction by constituents, community leaders, and their own desires for the community.

**Helpful Hints & Questions**

- Who do your county commissioners seek information from on a regular basis?
- Do you know the agendas of those individuals giving county commissioners information?
- Do you regularly update your county commissioners on the status of programs, services, etc. from the health department?
- Whenever you get a thank you letter or positive response from a client receiving services at the Health Department, share these comments with county commissioners.

<b>Important Community Leaders and Influential Local Groups</b>	<b>Personal Characteristics</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• County Management</li> <li>• County Attorney</li> <li>• County Finance Director</li> <li>• Fellow County Commissioners</li> <li>• Constituents/Tax Payers</li> <li>• Church Community and Leaders</li> <li>• Local Interests Groups</li> <li>• Local Media</li> <li>• Business Associations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal Philosophies</li> <li>• Personal Interests</li> <li>• Past Experiences</li> <li>• Influence of Family and Friends</li> <li>• Health-related Concerns</li> <li>• Financial/Business Interests</li> <li>• Faith-based Concerns</li> <li>• Political Affiliation</li> <li>• Educational Background</li> <li>• Cultural Interests and Background</li> </ul>

People in the community are not the only entities influencing county commissioners. Local government interests are also pretty persuasive. Health directors felt county requirements, economic development, communities' demands for services and programs, and other community pressures also played a large role in county commissioners' decision-making processes.

## How are NC Health Directors Interacting with Key Community Leaders?

Health directors participating in this survey employed a variety of techniques to interact with key community leaders. While most health directors interacted with community leaders through meetings and presentations, many noted the importance of participating in local social events.

### Helpful Hints & Questions:

- Does your local paper publish a community calendar for upcoming events?
- Do you regularly attend important community meetings?
- Do you have an updated contact list of important members in the community, their titles, and what boards/groups they actively participate in?
- Directly ask staff members who they think are important leaders in the community and what particular activities or issues in the community these individuals may be engaged in.

Examples	Benefits to this approach
Serve on the same boards and committees as county commissioners	(1) Regular and consistent interactions with key leaders help them remember who you are and what issues you support (2) Provides opportunities to identify where key leaders stand on issues and what their interests are
Give presentations to civic groups where county commissioners are members	(1) Provides opportunities to remind county commissioners of important health issues in the community (2) Your organization gets additional credibility and respect by being an accurate source of information for community members
Social events (e.g. golf tournaments, community suppers, community fund-raisers, etc.)	(1) Interactions with key community leaders are less stressful and friendlier (2) Great way to meet individuals who are associated with key leaders
Lunch meetings	(1) Establishes a personal relationship with key officials outside of business-related responsibilities and duties
Collaborate with other agencies, departments, and community stakeholders	(1) Generates greater support for a variety of community issues (2) Shows general interest in working together for

	the best interest of the community
Attend county meetings (e.g. county commissioners, school board, chamber of commerce)	(1) Generates greater support for a variety of community issues (2) Shows general interest in working together for the best interest of the community (3) This can help you identify who the real "movers and shakers" are in the community

### **COMMUNITY INTERACTIONS**

*"I try to be involved in key community boards and organization to be a 'connector' between public health and the community".*

*"It is important to know who your commissioners listen to and trust. It is equally important to know who they do not trust. I work hard to stay neutral and out of politics either way".*

*"If you're local, you know the key players".*

*"I know there are key and known community leaders and what I call 'real' or natural leaders in the community. My efforts are to contact and get to know all of those leaders to better understand the culture of the communities served".*

## What are NC Health Directors sharing with County Managers?

### Ongoing Updates

- Updates on major issues
- Weekly informational updates regarding health department activities
- Ongoing public health priorities, programs activities
  - Health status updates
  - Strategic plan
  - BT Preparedness
  - Program and/or project updates
  - Legislative needs/initiatives
  - Environmental health

### Response to Community Concerns and Current Issues

- Briefings on critical issues as needed (e.g. disease outbreaks)
- Issues that county managers may receive questions or complaints about from health department clients or other community members.

### Policy & Financial Approval and Issues

- Budget and finances
  - Expenditures
  - Funding from grants or state agencies
- Facility needs
- Personnel issues
  - Hiring and firing- (e.g. legal issues)
  - Salary adjustments
- Health department policy changes

### Other

- Board of Health updates, actions, and invitations to meetings
- Anything that needs their approval
- Event invitations and thank you notes

### Helpful Hints & Questions:

- How does your county manager prefer to receive routine updates?
- Provide ongoing updates as well as timely response to issues and concerns.
- Communicate with county managers in the same manner as county commissioners.

**Proactive UPDATES & Reactive RESPONSE** – Keeps county managers informed of issues, and allows for frequent interaction outside of regularly scheduled department head meetings. County managers are viewed as more accessible than county commissioners, but need to have information as quickly as county commissioners to avoid critical situations and political fallout.

Examples	Benefits to this approach
Individual Emails	(1) Gives facts and figures that CC can refer back to when citizens have questions (2) Quick and direct
Office meetings	(1) Can give county managers notice of important or critical issues (2) Opportunity to receive county manager's

	comments and feedback about issues before bringing them to the attention of county commissioners
Phone calls	(1) Can discuss complex issues, make sure they understand, and answer questions; (2) Can discuss potentially controversial issues one-on-one before presentation in a larger gathering (3) BOH members can make personal calls to bring attention to important issues (4) can address subjects one-on-one that are of particular interest to certain commissioners
Department head meetings	(1) Keeps County manager included and informed (2) Establishes regular contact with county manager
Lunch meetings	(1) establishes personal relationships outside of the office (2) creates opportunities to discuss personal opinions and concerns about community issues, health-related and otherwise
Monthly Reports	(1) Continuous, ongoing updates (2) Can avoid unintended surprises

## How are NC Health Directors Receiving Financial Support from County Managers?

NC Health directors are asking county managers for support in the same manner they ask for support from county commissioners:

1. During budget season only
2. When support from the boards of health are strong for a particular issue or service
3. When the service or issue directly affects the advancement of the health departments' strategic plan
4. When issues or services are mandated and unfunded by the State
5. When evidence from community health assessments indicate a strong need for a specific service.

## How are they asking for financial support?

Health directors participating in this survey used a variety of methods for asking county commissioners' for their financial support. These methods were based on what tactics are currently working in their favor, such as emails, telephone calls, and face-to-face meetings. County managers' limited time for face-to-face meetings outside of department head meetings also seems to determine how NC health directors provide county managers with information and updates. Many health directors report only contacting county managers for financial support during the budget process, but keeping county managers updated about their financial needs on a regular basis.

**Helpful Hints & Questions:**

- Does the county manager have all necessary information about a funding request?
- Does the county manager currently support/approve of programs or services needing more funding?

<b>Examples</b>	<b>Benefits to this approach</b>
Through the budget process	(1) County managers can help persuade county commissioners to increase funding for specific agencies, departments, programs, etc. (2) County commissioners are not surprised by sudden requests, because the budget is process-oriented.
Informational Handouts	(1) Makes the information personal (2) County managers are informed prior to the meeting about budget requests and have time to review the information. (3) Gives county managers time to directly speak with health directors about the budget requests and ask questions. (4) Can provide cost-benefit data analysis to strengthen case for increased funding (5) Can make a case for how additional funding for the health department can/will benefit multiple agencies. (6) Show how increased funding now will be more cost-effective in the future
Phone Calls or meetings	(1) Personal contact to address managers' concerns before requesting funding from county commissioners (2) Provides for a professional exchange of ideas concerning future of programs and services
Through Board of Health and/or Designated County Commissioner Liaison	(1) He or she already has a working relationship with the county manager (2) He or she knows what type of information the county manager can/should present to persuade county commissioners to increase funding

**Who or What Influences the Actions of County Managers in NC?**

NC health directors participating in this survey believe county managers are influenced by the several of the same community groups, issues, and personal values as county commissioners. However, health directors find county managers are most likely to be influenced by other individuals within county government rather than the community as a whole.

**Helpful Hints & Questions**

- Who do your county managers seek information from on a regular basis?
- Do you regularly update your county managers on the status of programs, services, etc. from the health department?

### **Important Community Leaders and Influential Local Groups**

- County Commissioners
- County Department Heads
- County Attorney
- County Finance Director
- UNC Institute of Government
- Tax Payers
- School Board
- Advisory Boards
- Media

NC health directors did not cite a variety of personal characteristics, other than personal values and interests as influencing county managers. The majority of health directors feel policy interests of the county commissioners, such as economic development, and the actions of other managers in similar situations are the primary influencers of county managers. Many health directors feel county managers make decisions based on their counties' strategic plans and citizens' concerns.