

# Washington State Department of Health

2011 Standards Review  
Site Reviewer & Consultant Evaluation

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Northwest Center for Public Health Practice  
School of Public Health, University of Washington

The Northwest Center for Public Health Practice (NWCPHP) promotes excellence in public health by linking academia and the practice community. As part of the University of Washington School of Public Health, NWCPHP provides training, research, and evaluation for state, local, and tribal public health in six Pacific Northwest states—Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming.

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**WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
2011 STANDARDS REVIEW  
SITE REVIEWER & CONSULTANT EVALUATION**

**INTRODUCTION**

The fourth performance review cycle of local health jurisdictions (LHJ) was performance in 2011. This was funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Multi-State Learning Collaborative Grant. This review was previously conducted in 2005 and 2008 to identify whether Standards were being met, areas of strength, and opportunities for improvement. To align with the national accreditation standards work currently underway, LHJs chose one of three review types a) the Basic Standards, b) the full Washington State Standards, or c) the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB) Standards.

The purpose of this project was to conduct an evaluation of the experience of the DOH site reviewers and external consultants during the 2011 LHJ Standards review process. The evaluation was conducted by the Northwest Center for Public Health Practice (NWCPHP) on behalf of WADOH.

**NORTHWEST CENTER FOR PUBLIC HEALTH PRACTICE**

NWCPHP promotes excellence in public health practice by linking academia and the practice community. As part of the University of Washington School of Public Health, NWCPHP provides training, research, and evaluation services for state, local, and tribal public health in six Pacific Northwest states (Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming). Services provided by NWCPHP also include technical assistance and a wide range of education and training activities.

**EVALUATION DESIGN**

The evaluation gathered information on six topics:

1. How effectively reviewers were prepared
2. How future preparation might be improved
3. How well the overall review process went
4. How future review processes might be improved
5. The benefits to the individual of being a reviewer
6. The benefits to the larger organization of being a reviewer

## **METHODS**

After discussions with WADOH project leads, a list of draft key informant interview questions was developed by NWCPHP staff. The draft questions were then reviewed and edited by WADOH staff, and a final list of 11 questions was agreed upon for interviews with LHJ site reviewers (Attachment A) and consultants (Attachment B). Interviews were conducted with the four WADOH site reviewers and the two external consultants (Attachment C) by phone with two staff members of NWCPHP. One NWCPHP staff member asked questions and the second typed responses. Both reviewed the transcript after each interview to check for completeness and correctness. Interviews were not audio recorded.

## **FINDINGS**

### *Reviewer Preparation*

#### Duties and Responsibilities

The reviewers were asked how clearly their duties and responsibilities had been communicated to them. Three said everything was clearly communicated; however, two of the three had previously been reviewers, and one had a supervisor who had previously been a reviewer. The final reviewer indicated that there was some initial confusion about the differences in roles between WADOH staff and consultants, but roles were clarified once the reviews started.

There was some initial confusion about the time commitment and what was our overall role verse the contractors' role; however, it was pretty clear once we were on the ground and running what we were supposed to do.

#### Reviewer Training

All four reviewers thought that the trainings they received to be reviewers were effective. The consultants agreed the trainings went well, noting the extensive Standards review experience of the DOH reviewers. However, responses indicated that there is room for improvement in future trainings. Although comfortable with the flexibility of the off-site part of the reviews, one reviewer indicated that there was not enough training on what to do during the on-site portion of the reviews. She wanted the on-site review to be more planned out, noting that the reviewers are guests at the LHJ and thus should use the LHJ's staff time efficiently. She would have liked to do a "walk-through" of the on-site review, with time spent discussing what was expected of the reviewers, what to bring, and what to be prepared to do.

Two reviewers indicated that technical difficulties prevented them from being trained on the scoring database in advance, which was frustrating. One reviewer noted that the mock review was helpful; however, another commented that she did not find it useful that the first review was treated as a training. She said she did not learn a lot from shadowing the consultants and would have preferred to learn the material herself on the go.

Overall the training caught the basics. However, during them we had difficulties with the laptops and access to the database. We were not able to access the database and receive training on it.

Finally, one reviewer commented that initially an additional three or four people had participated in the trainings. However, it appeared that they did not realize what they had signed up for. In the end, these people did not go on to be reviewers. This suggests that either recruitment for reviewers or the initial trainings could be improved.

#### Time for Review Preparation and Completion

All four reviewers indicated they had sufficient time to prepare for the reviews. One reviewer noted that she took some extra time to make sure she understood the timeframe for each standard and had all of her materials together.

Two reviewers said they had sufficient time to conduct the actual site reviews. A third reviewer also said she had sufficient time, but due to technical issues she ended up being overloaded for a few days. Finally, the last reviewer indicated that sometimes she thought there was too much time and sometimes too little time. An inability to access the scoring database during part of one review meant that the review took more time than she had dedicated to completing it.

We got all the reviews done, so I guess the answer [to did you have enough time?] is yes. But, it's pretty intense.

#### Workload

The reviewers were asked how manageable their workload had been as a reviewer. One said that although it was heavy, it was manageable. The other three gave more qualified responses, noting that it was sometimes difficult to manage the combination of their regular activities and their Standards work.

It's hard to juggle because it's a volunteer process. So it's not like someone comes in and does your work while you are working on the Standards.

#### Facilitators and Barriers to Reviewers Duties

The reviewers were asked what facilitated their ability to carry out their responsibilities. Two reviewers indicated that the support of their supervisor was essential. They said their supervisors understood that they did not have as much time as usual to dedicate to their core job duties. Two reviewers said the technologies of MindManager and the scoring database were helpful. Finally, pre-existing knowledge of the Standards, dedicated time away from the office to complete the reviews, and personal interest were cited as facilitating reviewers' duties.

My supervisor understood that the LHJ reviews are important and knew the things s/he asked me to do I might not respond to as quickly as I usually would. S/he was very supportive during the process allowing me the time to do the Standards work and allowing for changes in due dates of other projects that were important to her/him.

The reviewers also were asked about barriers to their ability to carry out their responsibilities as a reviewer. Three cited time as a barrier. One indicated that her initial unfamiliarity with public health was a barrier, as it took her a longer time to score documents that related to Standards specific to public health.

### *Overall Review Process*

The reviewers were asked overall how the review process could be improved and the consultants were asked what went well, where there were gaps, and an overall opinion of the 2011 review. All of the comments to these questions as well as relevant comments to other questions are summarized below under the following categories: 2011 Standards, Standards review process, technology, staff, and communication/logistics.

#### 2011 Standards

The reviewers commented on three aspects of the Standards: ambiguity in certain measures, frequent changes across reviews, and the three sets of measures in 2011. Two reviewers noted that many of the standards and measures are difficult to interpret. This is problematic, as it makes it difficult to ensure consistency across reviewers and across reviews. However, one reviewer noted that the Quality Reviews conducted in this cycle helped ensure consistency in scoring. In addition, one reviewer and one consultant noted frustration with the constant changing of the standards. They highlighted that the Standards cannot guide practice in LHJs until they are stable and comparable over time.

It would be good if the Standards were clearer. They're just not clear, and when things aren't clear it's hard to be consistent across multiple reviewers because there's so much left to interpretation.

Two reviewers and the two consultants commented on the choice to have three sets of Standards in the 2011 review. The two reviewers said having multiple standards made the reviewers' learning curve harder and increased their overall workload. In the future they hoped to return to one set of Standards across the state. The consultants agreed that having three sets of Standards was difficult, but their comments focused less on reviewer workload and more on loss of ability to compare LHJs across the state as well as compare 2011 and previous review cycles. However, the consultants emphasized that having three sets of standards this year had its benefits, since it resulted in having more LHJs participating in the process.

The pros and cons of having the basic option has made it difficult. Having the basic set resulted in more LHJ submitting and participating in the review process, but we lost comparability with other cycles almost completely.

#### Standards Review Process

The review process in 2011 was significantly revamped from previous years. Historically, reviews were conducted entirely at the LHJs and final reports were not sent back to the LHJs until all reports were complete. This meant that some LHJs had a lag of months between their review and receipt of their report. In 2011, all LHJs submitted documents to WADOH in February. The reviewers conducted an initial off-site review and submitted a document to each LHJ on the Standards that had not been fully met. Each LHJ was given about a week to respond to the document, and then the reviewers completed the on-site portion of the review and a final closing conference.

I think the off-site review was a great improvement. It was good to have the counties get their documents to us in advance so we could sit down and really look at them. It meant we weren't limited to the hours that we were at the LHJs.

One reviewer and both consultants praised the decision to start with an off-site review. They said it gave the reviewers more time to fully review the documents, and prevented the time-crunch that occurs when everything has to happen on site. Similarly, the decision to send a partially-met Standards report was appreciated by one reviewer and the two consultants. It streamlined the process by allowing LHJs to respond to questions all at one time and in one document. However, one reviewer commented that the LHJs could have used more time to respond to the report. They only had seven days, and two weeks was suggested as more appropriate. Similarly, the reviewers had very little time, often less than a day, to review the LHJ's response to the report before the onsite review. Ideally the reviewer would have liked a week to review the LHJ's responses.

In the past, it was cumbersome having LHJ staff run around the day of the site review to answer reviewer questions. Instead we reviewers compiled all questions in one document and gave the LHJ time to respond.

### Technology

There were two primary types of technology used during the 2011 LHJ Standards review: MindManager and a scoring database. MindManager is a program the LHJs used to organize and submit documents and the reviewers used to look through the submitted documents. The scoring database was a program built to score LHJs on the various standards and measures. Although both programs were useful in particular ways, they also caused a great deal of frustration and lost time.

### **Mind Manager**

Two reviewers did not agree with the emphasis placed on using MindManager. One found it cumbersome and not particularly helpful. She said that she did not use the MindMaps LHJs built unless it was the only way to look at the LHJ's documentation. The other reviewer noted that it did not help her as a reviewer and it added to the workload of the LHJs. In contrast, the two consultants praised the use of MindManager. One was pleased that it forced LHJs to think through how they would aggregate their documents. She also called out the usefulness of the ReadMe notes. The other consultant thought there should be more training on MindManager to prevent problems, but that it was a good decision to emphasize its use.

The emphasis on MindManager is really overdone. As both a state employee and a reviewer, I just don't find it that helpful. I heard from some LHJs that it significantly added to the work load.

In other comments, two reviewers and one consultant noted the importance of good document organization. One commented that some LHJs submitted large documents without an explanation of why they were being submitted, or what aspects of the document were important for meeting a measure. Another noted that not taking the time to explain a document can reduce a site's score because the reviewers do not know what they are looking for.

Some LHJs gave us documentation but nothing that summarized what the document actually was. It would be more efficient and easier for us if the LHJs submitted a document that outlines their documentation so I don't have to fish through a 150 page document.

Both the consultants and reviewers agreed on the importance of having LHJs explain their document organization, but disagreed on the best way to encourage LHJs to do this. It appears that the consultants see MindManager as an ideal way to organize and explain documents through MindMaps and ReadMe notes. The reviewers are not tied to this software and some found it cumbersome for both the reviewers and the LHJs.

### **Scoring Database**

Comments regarding the scoring database were similar to many of the comments made above about Mind Manger. Although the reviewers liked the concept of a database to score LHJs, the execution of the database built for the 2011 reviews was problematic.

One reviewer commented that it would be ideal to have the database set up in advance so that reviewers could be trained on it and familiar with it before the first review. Two reviewers said it was frustrating and wasteful that the database was not fully functional until midway through the reviews. One noted that at one point all of the reviewers were in a room together ready to do a review, but they could not proceed because the database was not operational. She noted that this represented a great deal of wasted time and money.

Having the database itself is a good thing. It would be harder to do the review without the database, but it would be nice if the database would work right the first time.

The two consultants echoed these comments, noting that overall the system worked well, but some of the initial glitches caused the reviewers to lose hours. Further, one consultant noted that WADOH technically does not support Access databases, which is the software the scoring database uses. It was problematic to get approval to use the database. However, the same consultant noted that once the program was built and in use, the WADOH technical staff were extremely helpful in fixing any problems that arose.

### **Staff**

There were a few comments made both about the DOH and consultant staffing. Two reviewers said that there were many people working on this project and it was often unclear to whom questions should be directed. One reviewer was frustrated because she sometimes received contradictory emails. In addition she had trouble reaching some of the WADOH staff responsible for organizing the site reviewers. The other reviewer emphasized the importance of having a central place at WADOH where LHJs could direct their questions.

Similarly, the two consultants noted there was a lot of turnover at WADOH staff during the 2011 Standards review. Some staff members with a great deal of knowledge were no longer available, meaning that WADOH could not provide the same level of support it once did. In addition, staff turnover meant that there was some confusion regarding documents and review dates and times. This was eventually fixed, but ended up creating additional work.

There were a number of staff changes at DOH. Once the staffing issues were straightened out, the DOH staff came together and fixed things. However, there was a time there were things were not running smoothly and it created rework.

Two reviewers praised the consultants' knowledge of and perspective on the Standards. One reviewer noted that she sometimes thought they were too easy grading the LHJs during the review. Yet, she realized over time that the consultants were focusing on the big picture, trying to keep the momentum going, and keep the LHJs moving forward. However, one reviewer thought that the consultants needed to be more careful in some of their comments. She was uncomfortable that they appeared sometimes to be speaking for WADOH, even though they are not state employees.

The consultants are not employees of DOH and they have a different perspective. As such, I don't think it's appropriate that they speak on behalf of DOH or Washington State and I saw that happen on multiple occasions.

### Communication and Logistics

The two consultants said that communication with LHJs could be improved in future reviews. One noted that it was good to identify a coordinator at each LHJ with whom communication could be focused. However, she wished that the consultants had requested more communication back from these coordinators, confirming receipt and understanding of messages. The other noted that some LHJs became frustrated by the timeline because of misunderstandings that could have been averted.

There were a couple of LHJs who were angry that we had the luxury of three months to look at their documents. But although we had their documents on file, they were not reviewed until the end of the cycle. I think we need to do a better job communicating so that people understand what is actually involved and the timeline of the process.

Two reviewers commented that some of the logistics of the review process happened at the last minute. One reviewer commented that coordination between WADOH staff and consultants was lacking on a number of topics, including schedules, travel expectations, and roles and responsibilities.

### *Impact of Being a Reviewer*

#### Why People Become Reviewers

The reviewers were asked why they had chosen to be a Standards reviewer and if they would do it again. All four indicated they would be a reviewer again. For two reviewers, being part of the Standards review process was a part of their job role and/or workplan. For the other two, it was way to learn more about public health in general, and the functioning of the local health departments in Washington State in particular. In addition, two reviewers indicated that they believe in the review process, see it as important, and want to support it.

I've spent a lot of time with state Standards, so it's an interest of mine. I value the process and the benefits our state has accrued from the standards process that we have set up. I think it's a meaningful process that should be supported.

#### Impact on the Individual and Organization

The reviewers were asked if being a reviewer was a valuable experience for them as an individual and for their larger department/division. All four found it valuable on both an individual and departmental level, citing four main reasons: interacting with LHJs, seeing

examples of good Standards documents, helping with preparation for the next DOH review, and increasing their familiarity with the Standards.

First, being a reviewer gave them the opportunity to both interact with individual LHJs and take a system-wide look at public health in Washington State. One noted that being a reviewer gave her a rich, detailed view of what LHJs are doing that she can use to inform how best to support them in the future. Another noted that this was an opportunity for her to establish relationships with LHJ staff that she could then draw on in her everyday work. She added that the Standards process helped WADOH convey to the LHJs that it wants to help them be successful in pursuit of accreditation. Two noted that being a reviewer allowed them to see systemic features of Washington's LHJs. These systemic features included shared strengths and weaknesses, areas of divergent abilities, and the impact of layoffs and budget cuts.

Being a reviewer also helped me to see places that DOH could improve in our support of LHJs. If there is something all the LHJ's are failing at that DOH has influence over, it makes me think: What could we be doing that we're not doing?

All four reviewers commented that they found value in seeing examples of how other organizations have met Standards. Reviewers saw examples of materials they had not thought to use and approaches they had not thought to try. Two reviewers noted that they had made an effort to replicate some of the best work and/or documents in their own Standards work.

A few times I saw someone effectively submit one page to fulfill a standard that I had agonized over when I was trying to meet it for my department.

Three reviewers noted that their role as a LHJ reviewer has made them more prepared for the next review their organization experiences. They now understand what reviewers are looking for and can thus be better providers of materials. Further, it showed them how to build strong processes into their departments so that in the future they can be even more effective in meeting the Standards.

Finally, three commented that being a reviewer has increased their familiarity with the Standards. One reviewer said this will be useful as she leads information gathering for Standards for her department. Another noted that this increase in familiarity will be helpful for her everyday work and can be used to guide project planning.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

The following is a compilation of suggestions that WADOH reviewers and the consultants made for future Standards reviews.

### *WADOH Reviewer Training*

- Conduct a “walk-through” of the on-site review, discussing the timeline and focusing on what reviewers should bring to the review and be prepared to do.
- Spend more time in the training understanding the required documentation for the more complex Standards and measures.
- Focus reviewer training on the Standards and measures that reviewers found particularly difficult and/or ambiguous in previous years.

### *Staffing and Support*

- Appoint one WADOH staff member to coordinate all of the WADOH site reviewer work. Ensure that person is easy to reach and responsive to inquiries.
- Add site reviewer responsibilities into staff workplans and reduce other responsibilities in their workplans to accommodate these added duties.
- Educate WADOH supervisors about the time, energy, and effort their staff will need to dedicate to being a reviewer.
- Show appreciation of supervisors’ support by sending thank you notes to reviewers’ division supervisors from the Office of Performance & Accountability and/or consultants.
- Ensure reviewers have updated laptops with the same generation software.
- Standardize the number of reviews each reviewer completes.

### *Interaction with LHJs*

- Provide LHJs with more time between when they are sent the partially met document and when they have to respond. Provide reviewers with more time between when they receive the response and the on-site review.
- Encourage LHJs to submit a document that outlines and/or explains their documentation. This may be through MindManager or another software/system.
- Better communicate the review timeline to the LHJs so they understand what is involved from the reviewer side.
- Offer counties without prior Standards review experience additional training and/or guidance.
- Make explicit the added value of the Standards review process to the LHJs so they understand the benefits of the process. Some have expressed feeling coerced to participate in the Standards review since it is tied to receiving local capacity grants.
- Ensure all participating LHJs know they have the option of an on-site closing conference, as LHJs found this more valuable than the phone or iLinc options.
- Ask LHJs to communicate back to reviewers that they received and understood messages.

### *Other*

- Make the Standards and Measures less ambiguous.
- Keep the Standards consistent year to year.
- Finalize the logistical pieces of the review in advance to prevent last minute problems.

**Northwest Center for Public Health Practice  
WADOH 2011 Standards Review  
Site Reviewer & Consultant Evaluation**

**Attachment A: WADOH Site Reviewer Key Informant Interview Protocol**

Purpose: The purpose of this conversation is to conduct an evaluation of reviewer experiences for the 2011 LHJ Review Standards Process.

Confidentiality: Answers to these questions are confidential and your name will not be linked to your responses. All conversation comments will be aggregated and a summary of findings and conclusions will be compiled into an evaluation report.

I expect this conversation will take 30-60 minutes. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Q#	QUESTION	RESPONSE
<b>Reviewer Preparation</b>		
01	How clearly were your duties and responsibilities communicated to you?  <i>How might communication be improved?</i>	
02	How effective was the training you received to be a reviewer?  <i>How could reviewer preparation be improved?</i>	
03	Did you have enough time to prepare to be a reviewer?  <i>Enough time to conduct reviews?</i>	
<b>Overall Review</b>		
04	How manageable was your workload as a reviewer?	
05	What facilitated your ability to carry out your responsibilities as a reviewer?  <i>Probe: i.e. Tools, training, tech support, preplanning documentation?</i>	
06	What were barriers in your ability to carry out your responsibilities as a reviewer?	

07	<p>Overall, how could the review process be improved?</p> <p><i>What would you like to see done differently?</i></p> <p><i>What advice do you have for future reviews?</i></p>	
<b>Value of Being a Reviewer</b>		
08	<p>Why did you apply to be a Standards reviewer?</p> <p><i>Would you apply to be a reviewer again?</i></p>	
09	<p>Was being a Standards reviewer a valuable experience for you? If so, what aspects were most valuable?</p> <p><i>Has being a reviewer influenced your daily work? How?</i></p>	
10	<p>Has being a reviewer added value to your department?</p> <p><i>Has your experience being a reviewer influenced your department's work?</i></p>	
11	<p>Is there anything else you think we should know about your experience as a reviewer?</p>	

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**Attachment B: Consultant Key Informant Interview Protocol**

Purpose: The purpose of this conversation is to conduct an evaluation of consultants experiences for the 2011 LHJ Standards Review process.

Confidentiality: Answers to these questions are confidential and your name will not be linked to your responses. All conversation comments will be aggregated and a summary of findings and conclusions will be compiled into an evaluation report.

I expect this conversation will take 30-60 minutes. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Q#	QUESTION	RESPONSE
<b>Reviewer Trainings</b>		
01	How did the training of DOH reviewers go?	
02	How could the review trainings be improved in the future?  <i>Probe: How may technology change this in the future?</i>	
<b>Overall Review</b>		
03	What parts of the review process went well?	
04	What were gaps in the review process?	
05	Overall, how did the review process go?	
06	How could the review process be improved in future years?  <i>What would you like to see done differently?</i>	
<b>Lessons Learned</b>		
07	What lessons were learned from this review process that could be applied to future reviews?	
08	Is there anything else you think we should know about your experience with the 2011 LHJ Standards Review?	

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**Attachment C: List of Key Informants**

WADOH Site Reviewers

- Kris Kernan
- Pam Lovinger
- Susan Ramsey
- Kim Zabel

Consultants

- Diane Altman
- Marni Mason