B. PROJECT OVERVIEW

Project Name:
Diversity Matters: Recruiting Wisconsin's Future Public Health Workforce
HWPP Project Number:
2011I-04

Without exceeding this one (1) page, briefly describe your project and partnership.

The overall goal of this project is to increase the diversity of Wisconsin's public health workforce. The project focuses on African American and Hispanic youth, and uses social marketing as the primary strategy.

Wisconsin's public health workforce is facing a crisis – significant health disparities, ever-increasing health care expenses, the consequent need to focus on prevention, the increased recognition of the impact of social and economic determinants on health, and an impending decrease in the capacity of the public health workforce to foster healthy communities. To move forward, the public health workforce must reflect the demographics of the community (diversity), be sufficient, and be competent in providing the essential public health services.

The Health Services and Resources Administration (HRSA) indicates that a diverse health care workforce can help address disparities. Wisconsin has large health disparities and does not have a diverse public health workforce. The local health department (LHD) workforce would require a three-fold increase in African American and Hispanic workers to have a workforce similar in proportion to the population served. Disparities in worker-client ratios are likely contributing to the significant health disparities in Wisconsin. In a recent report, no age group in Wisconsin received a health disparities “grade” higher than a “C”. HRSA goes on to note additional reasons why a diverse workforce is important: "A diverse health workforce is important in assuring the delivery of culturally competent health care and preventive services. Minority health professionals can serve as role models in our diverse communities... Minority Americans are five times more likely to treat other under-represented minorities in underserved areas."

Building on a successful HWPP Development Grant (2007-2008), the partners will begin to address the challenge of increasing diversity in the public health workforce with the following objectives: 1) By January 2013, identify the current non-public health career pathways most frequently chosen by, the barriers impeding the selection of a public health career by, and the rewards desired by African American and Hispanic high school and college students; 2) By Summer 2013, based on assessment results, and marketing and workforce best practices, develop a plan for a creative, youth-oriented and contemporary social marketing effort to increase the number of African American and Hispanic high school and college students who select a public health career path; 3) By Fall 2013, implement the marketing plan; 4) From Fall 2013-December 2016, community and academic partners will conduct ongoing process and impact evaluations of the social marketing efforts; 5) Throughout the project, sustain a strong community-academic partnership – at both the core partner and Advisory Committee levels – through collaborative activities.

The project partners propose a novel application of evidence-based social marketing to public health workforce recruitment. This project will use marketing science to better understand what is important to African American and Hispanic youth, what barriers affect their pursuit of a public health career, how barriers can be addressed, and how to offer a career choice in public health that will be more appealing than other competitive career options. Over the long term (10-15 years), this project can lead to increased diversity in the public health workforce and, ultimately, increased success in addressing health disparities.

The core partners on this project, Medical College of Wisconsin, Wisconsin Public Health Association and Wisconsin Division of Public Health, worked closely together for 18 months in the implementation of the HWPP-funded Call to Action project and will continue to do so for this effort. Collectively, the partners will expand relationships (via the Advisory Committee), evaluate the effectiveness of the partnership and explore additional funding opportunities. The Advisory Committee will include representation from minority health, minority health professions, academia (graduate, undergraduate and technical college levels), governmental public health, health professional associations, schools and workforce development entities. The expertise, resources and commitment of these organizations will undoubtedly lead to a stronger network and a sustainable voice for increasing the diversity of the public health workforce.