OSTLTS Technical Assistance and Service Improvement
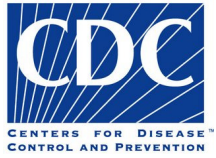
Focus Group Report

Office for State, Tribal, Local and Territorial Support (OSTLTS)

October 24, 2011

Version 4.0

1. Purpose/ Background

The purpose of these Technical Assistance and Service Improvement focus groups was to gather information to better understand and describe the various project officer service delivery models across CDC programs. More specifically, the objectives of the interviews were to:

1. Identify the similarities as well as the differences among these service delivery models including monitoring and assessing performance improvement among awardees;

2. Understand the support systems (like mentoring programs, etc) and training resources that are available to project officers to support their professional and career development;

3. Understand the kinds of challenges project officers face in their current positions; and

4. Obtain guidance on how CDC as an agency could best collect and/or highlight the work of project officers or networking opportunities that would support project officers.

A. Participant Selection

The selection of a sample of project officers and their supervisors to participate in the focus group interviews was completed in a two-phased approach. Phase I included the identification of divisions and branches providing administrative oversight to defined cooperative agreements while Phase II included a random selection to identify the sample of project officers from those selected divisions/branches. A complete description of this process is presented below.

Purposive Sampling Method – Selection of the Divisions / Branches

A purposive sampling method with the FY 2010 Grant Funding Profiles and FY 2010 Impac II system as the data sources was used for selecting CIOs, Divisions and Branches for inclusion in the focus group interviews. Criteria for this purposive sampling method are as follows:

- Cooperative Agreements with a focus on programmatic activities. Exclusions included those cooperative agreements with a focus on training and research.
- Cooperative Agreements awarded primarily with STLT health departments / government organizations. Exclusions included those cooperative agreements awarded primarily to educational institutions, research organizations, community-based organizations, and non-governmental organizations.
- Divisions and branches that provide administrative oversight and technical assistance for these cooperative agreements.
- Total sample provides representation across different CIOs administrating these cooperative agreements.
- Total sample provides variation in the amount of funds awarded through these cooperative agreements. (The amount of funding awarded through the selected divisions/branches ranges from $9 million - $ 665 million.)
- Total sample provides representation among national and CDC priorities (e.g., PHEP; Tobacco Prevention and Control).
- Total sample provides representation from "newer" programs (e.g., NPHII) as well as longer established programs (e.g., HIV Prevention Projects).

<u>*Random Sampling Method – Selection of the Project Officers*</u>

A random sampling approach was used to select project officers from those divisions and branches selected to participate in the focus group interviews. The data sources for identification and selection of project officers included the following:

1. For those branches that publish their project officer contact list via the CDC intranet or CDC internet, project officers were randomly selected from this publication.

2. Current list of project officers provided by a TA & SI Workgroup representative.

3. CDC neighborhood staff lists by organization and branch. Occupational group "600 Medical, Hospital, Dental and Public Health Group" and occupational series codes "601 General Health Science" and "685 Public Health Program Specialist" were used as filters for the branch staff lists.

Participants included 35 project officers and 26 leaders from the following:

- Office of Infectious Disease
  - o National Center of HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD and TB Prevention
    - ▪ Division of HIV/AIDS Prevention / Prevent Program Branch
    - ▪ Division of TB Elimination / Field Services and Evaluation Branch
  - o National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Disease
    - ▪ Immunization Services Division / Program Operations Branch
- Office of Noncommunicable Disease, Injury and Environmental Health
  - o National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion
    - ▪ Division of Cancer Prevention and Control / Comprehensive Cancer Control Branch
    - ▪ Office on Smoking and Health / Program Services Branch
  - o National Center for Injury Prevention and Control
    - ▪ Division of Injury Response / Program Team
- Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry
    - ▪ Division of Health Assessment and Consultation / Cooperative Agreement Program and Evaluation Branch
- Office of Public Health Preparedness and Response
  - o Division of State and Local Readiness / Program Services Branch
- Office of State, Tribal, Local and Territorial Support
  - o Division of Public Health Performance Improvement / Technical Assistance Branch

Participation rates for the leadership and project officer focus groups were 81.25% (26 of 32) and 74.47% (35 of 47), respectively, with an overall participation of 77.22% (61 of 79).

B.   Focus Group Structure

Focus groups were and conducted with two facilitators and a recorder; comments and remarks were captured in each session by a recorder. The 90 minute focus groups were structured in the following manner:

15 minutes	Introductions, background, purpose of focus group
70 minutes	Solicit discussion and feedback to focus group questions, probe for detail and clarity.
5 minutes	Allow for Questions and Answers, thank participants, re-affirm use of results, clarify next steps and proposed timeline.

Focus group facilitation guides were utilized for each respective group of interviews, Leadership/ Supervisors and Project Officers; examples of questions are included in Appendix A and Appendix B, respectively.

C. Analysis:

Each facilitated focus group was documented and a qualitative analysis of the data conducted; for each focus group held, key themes for topic area discussed were identified, which were then compared and aggregated across all focus groups resulting in a comprehensive list of categorical findings and recommendations below:
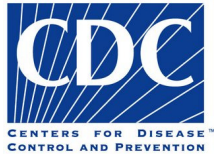
2. Findings

DEFINITIONS

The objective of this section is to collect information on and gain an understanding of the terms and definitions used for the staff providing administrative oversight and TA for Cooperative Agreements. The ultimate goal of this section is to inform the development of common term and definition agency wide.

A varied range of terms/semantics were reported to be utilized by branch leadership and supervisors to refer to staff providing administrative oversight and technical assistance (TA) to cooperative agreement awardees. Of the nine branches interviewed, three use the terms "project officer" and "program consultant", interchangeably; however, it is important to note that two of these branches indicate that "program consultant" most closely relates to the totality of duties that staff perform. Other branches cited "project officer" (2 branches) and "program consultant" (2 branches) as the term most used to define their staff in this role. Further terms, "Performance Officer" and "Technical Project Officer", were used by two additional branches and these terms derive from the 'specialty duties' that the branch identifies these positions to conduct; Technical Project Officers, deliver more technical, subject-matter related or content based support to grantees, while Performance Officers were defined with similar duties as a project officer within the context of an award focused on performance management and improvement.

Findings:

- The delineation of names/terms used by a particular agency is often to define the primary function of work the staff provides.
- Across many agencies, program consultant duties were largely cited to be the primary programmatic monitoring and managing of the cooperative agreement including more comprehensive programmatic functions; while "project officer" and "performance officer" was most often associated with the administrative or business management functions

including the budget - related duties of the position. While the duties associated with the use of these terms also include programmatic guidance as it relates to the activities associated with the work plan, staff serve largely as liaisons to subject matter experts (most often referred to by these programs as "program consultants") for TA and support on specific content related needs.

- The term "technical project officer" was most often defined as subject matter experts (SMEs) who provide more in-depth, specialized, subject matter content-specific technical assistance to grantees. In these descriptions, there was less focus on administrative or budget-related duties as compared to those programs using the term "project officer".

Recommendations:

- As the distribution of the use of terms was fairly equal, and this was not a question that was directly posed to project officers (often times discussion with project officers led to this topic, however it was only formally posed to leadership/management), it might be useful to include this topic - regarding semantics used to refer to project officers - in the internal survey to gain a broader idea and understanding of the terms used agency wide, by project officers, in order to gain a common term and definition.
- Also, due to the varied range of semantics, it might be beneficial to include a survey item, on the internal project officer survey, to assess project officers' opinion of the use of a universal term or if a universal term for the position series is necessary /beneficial.
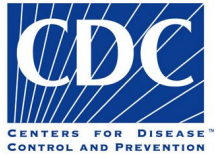
WORKFORCE EXPECTATIONS / RESPONSIBILITIES

The objective of this section is to collect information on and gain an understanding of the responsibilities, skills, knowledge and competencies required of the project officers. The ultimate goal of these questions is to inform the development of workforce profile.

Across branches, although utilizing different semantics to describe responsibilities and/or duties, leadership and project officers, alike, regard the responsibilities as a project officer very similarly; many consider their duties to include providing guidance and support to grantees including, but not limited to: being the first point of contact for grantees; providing technical assistance; fiduciary responsibilities (budget mark ups, responding to budget questions, and serving as a liaison with PGO); serving as a liaison or connection to appropriate subject matter experts (SMEs); reviewing and monitoring grants; ensuring performance improvement among grantees; building relationships/partnerships among grantees/ other partners; and conducting regular site visits. While a large majority cited that they are "generalists" with respect to providing technical assistance, many cited that specific content knowledge regarding the program they are working for is critical to being a successful in the project officer role.

Findings:

- Key characteristics of an effective project officer most cited include: communication skills; interpersonal/people skills, negotiation skills; experience working in the field; budgetary knowledge and skills; policy and systems change experience; program evaluation knowledge, responsiveness and providing timely feedback as well as flexibility in an ever changing environment.
- Common resources used to leverage work include written resources such as program manuals, colleagues/other project officers (information sharing), networking, SMEs,

other CDC resources and scientific journals; however there were inconsistencies between the responses of leadership and project officers concerning the availability and use of these resources. Various leadership state the availability of the above resources, however project officers of the same branches often cited the use of such resources are not implemented.

- Among the branches there is inconsistency regarding outlining expectations for the project officers. Programs with larger breadth of funding, cited program manuals, orientation manuals and standard operation procedures (SOPs) as the tools used to outline expectations; however in smaller-breadth programs, project officers often cited no formal orientation manuals, documents and/or tools existed to assist them in outlining their work and having to self-identify resources or "buddy" with an established project officer.
- Project officers who were considered models or leaders in their branches exhibited these most cited characteristics: Experience in the field; solution – oriented ("finding the solution to grantee's problems"); motivated; demonstrating initiative; proactive and having considerable positive relationships with their grantees.

Recommendations:

- It appears that programs with smaller breadth/width of funding, lack the formal documentation that project officers can reference, compared to programs with larger/breadth of funding; however, it remains unclear if this distinction affects project officer performance. Therefore, it might be beneficial to include survey items, on the internal project officer survey, which assess whether, 1) the resources provided are appropriate (despite formal documentation, or lack thereof) in providing the information needed to perform their duties, 2) project officers are aware of these resources, and 3) if these resources are accessible.
- As information-sharing or "buddying" with a fellow project officer to garner resources to leverage work, it might be useful to explore enabling this information-sharing to occur virtually on the project officer portal; it will also leave a virtual "footprint" where additional project officers can review/utilize this information.
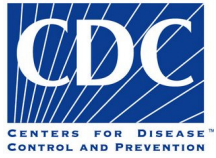
SERVICE DELIVERY MODELS
The objective of this section is to collect information on and gain an understanding of organizational structure and system in which technical assistance is provided.

Overall, while most branches interviewed are structured differently, many branches are regionally organized to provide capacity building and technical assistance to awardees in respective regions; those not structured or assigned by regions (e.g., geographically FEMA regions), are normally assigned using "goodness-of-fit" with PO/grantee strengths or personality types. Subject matter experts (SMEs), both internally and externally across branches, are additional primary sources of TA and are scientific or technical in nature dependent upon the individual awardees needs.

Findings:

- Programs with larger breadth of funding/grantees have formal, documented processes or systems in place to monitor and/or track TA compared to those programs with a

smaller breadth of funding/grantees that cited there are no formal processes in place to document technical assistance and use notes from conference calls, one-on-one calls, etc. to document TA;

- Branches cited routine staff meetings, information sharing, and conference calls with grantees (so all received the same message at the same time) as the primary avenues in which to ensure consistent messages and TA are being delivered to grantees.

- Most focus group interview participants (leadership and project officers) often cited the positive nature of the relationships they maintain with their awardees as the primary method of assessing grantees satisfaction; many indicated that grantees were not "shy" in voicing opinions or displeasure and do not hesitate to contact the project officer and/or supervisors (for escalation) as needed, however a majority of project officers/leadership cited no formal processes/systems were in place to assess satisfaction.

- Regarding the external survey, in almost all instances, the Program Manager or Program Director is the appropriate individual to complete the survey. Although the individual listed in the Cooperative Agreement is the official point of contact, this person is, at times, not the person who has the most frequent contact with the project officer to assess STLT satisfaction with TA and support.
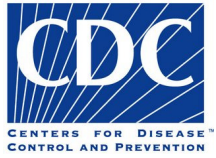
Recommendations:

- As most references from project officers/leadership, concerning STLTs satisfaction with technical assistance, were reported to be of a verbal nature from grantee to project officer/leadership, it would be very valuable in assessing STLTs perception of the technical assistance that is provided; focus group interviewing selected STLTs, as done with this focus group, will be beneficial in the development of the external survey as well.

- As evidenced through discussion regarding the external survey, it would be valuable to include respective internal CDC programs in the announcement/notification and dissemination of the external survey to ensure valuable response rate and quality data.

PROVISION OF TA TO AWARDEES
The objective of this section is to collect information on what, how, and when TA is identified / provided to awardees as well as information related to how performance improvement is managed.

A diverse range exists regarding the number of STLTS a project officer manages across the branches interviewed; with branches with smaller-breadth of funding, managing a smaller number of health departments per project officer versus the programs with larger-breadth of funding, managing a larger number of health departments per project officer. This number was often in direct correlation to the number of health departments the branch funded overall – many programs with a smaller breadth of funding do not fund all 50 states or territories, while many "larger-breadth" programs fund all 50 state HDs as well as tribal and territorial agencies (with some programs managing more than one cooperative agreement per STLT) . However, there was also variability in the number of awards supported by project officers as well as the number
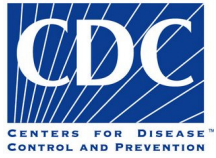
of *unfunded* states receiving support or TA by project officers. Correspondingly, there was diverse opinion concerning the manageability of this workload; some felt their workload is manageable while others feel overloaded with grantee assignments, in addition to other work requirements that are important, including monitoring contracts with national partners and internal workgroups, etc.

Findings:

- Important distinctions exist between programs interviewed, in terms of the provision (source) of technical assistance as well as the recipients of technical assistance; a particular branch with a large breadth and width of funding (higher number of grantees and higher number of cooperative agreements per grantee) funds external organizations to provide technical assistance to grantees nationwide, while a program with smaller breadth/width of funding, provides technical assistance to STLTs that are not funded by a cooperative agreement for budgetary reasons.
- A majority of comments about the type of technical assistance provided are very similar, if not identical to responses regarding the duties and responsibilities of the project officer. It was in this section/discussion that many comments regarding advocacy and policy stemmed; many participants cited feeling that advocacy or being an advocate for both STLTs and CDC was an important part of their responsibilities when providing technical assistance.
- Identification of technical assistance needed was largely through grantees contact with project officers on a daily or routine basis and not through a formal process and/or system.
- Challenges monitoring grantees' budgets were often cited as "real-time" financial information was not available to the project officers. Reports submitted were one of the methods in which project officers gained evidence of the funds expended, however several noted that the inability to see budget draw downs and viewing the FSR, which only details the funds that have been spent, as major challenges in monitoring the financial obligations of awardees during a performance period. "Collaboration" with PGO was also cited as a barrier.
- When supporting a cooperative agreement, an overwhelming majority of project officers work with the program manager or director and/or principal investigator (PI) noted on the cooperative agreement. Most interaction with state health officials is limited but may exist in circumstances of site visits and/or in escalation of unresolved issues.
- Evaluating performance of STLT awardees was often cited to be conducted through assessment of the awardees' Interim and Annual progress reports rather than through formal means of evaluation and/or performance assessments. Programs with larger breadth and width of funding often had evaluation branches and/or evaluation staff to conduct evaluation on established performance indicators; however other branches solely use the IPR/APR to assess grantees' performance and progress towards goals.
- While some programs have "in-house" subject matter experts (SMEs), other programs must use external (to the program) SMEs to respond to grantee's content related questions; many cite difficulty and resistance connecting with external SMEs as barriers to providing technical assistance in a timely manner.

Recommendations:

- Due to the distinctiveness of programs interviewed, STLTs should be surveyed to assess their perception/opinion of the TA provided them. Focus groups with random selection of participants (similar to TASI focus groups) of STLTs, would inform the development of the external survey.
- For internal project officer survey: Develop questions to assess project officers' work with PGO; (i.e., what works, what doesn't, what are some frequently asked questions) to obtain quantifiable challenges (or successes) working with PGO.
- It may be beneficial to "focus group" or "survey" identified SMEs, for while not project officers, their work is directly correlated to the "success" of providing timely, consistent technical assistance and was cited as a barrier to some programs.
- Due to the varying responses regarding the performance of awardees, it may be valuable to include in the internal survey/assess the number of project officers who work with formal evaluation support/assistance and those that do not. Many project officers cited the IPR/APR as sources used to evaluate performance and while these do provide an outline of STLT activities, it does not give a measurable point of performance.
- In internal survey, include survey items that assess perception/satisfaction levels of workload (number of awardees or cooperative agreements assigned, complexity of program, other support to non-funded/external agencies, etc.)
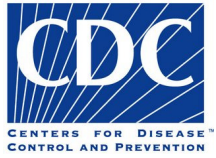

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The objective of this section is to collect information on the types of professional development required and/or available to POs.

Overall, there is variety in responses regarding required courses for project officers; responses vary by branch and, further, branch understanding of what is required (regarding COTR training) is varied as well. A large proportion of project officers and leadership indicated there were few required courses, if any; however, those who monitor and/or manage contracts cited they were required to participate in COTR training. Additionally, there are project officers who do not manage contracts who participate in COTR training as requirement in their respective branch.

The other major recommended training most often cited, was the Project Officer of the Future, however most project officer participants stated that the training had very limited availability and did not relate or pertain to their respective content area of work. An additional course mentioned by leadership was Program Consultant Certification Program (PRCP). However, this course was rarely identified by project officers. Of those courses required, many branches had content specific training requirements (i.e., Emergency Preparedness ICS training series for those working in DSLR/PSB). Both leadership and project officers cited content specific trainings to be major training gaps.

Findings:

- Time (or lack thereof), workload, in addition to the inability to use their Individual Learning Accounts (ILA), were the major cited barriers and challenges to professional growth and professional development.
- Many leadership and project officers indicated that project officers are encouraged to self-identify any relevant trainings needed; however, restrictions with travel and ILA impede the ability to do so.

- There were a number of leadership who cited they do not require their project officers to take any trainings other than those required to remain a CDC employee; others cited there are no requirements because there is not a set list of CDC project officer –related trainings their POs are required to complete.
- Other cited training or professional development opportunities in which project officers participate include conferences; mentor programs; self-identified trainings on CDC University.
- Training gaps largely varied from branch to branch and many of those gaps existed in content specific areas; however shared training gaps that were most often cited include, basic foundational trainings for project officers that detail the core expectations for project officers and reinforce project officer expectations ("what it is to be a project officer"); writing workshops; budgetary or budget related training; verbal communication skills; interpersonal and our relationship building skills; performance management/evaluation; project management and policy related trainings.
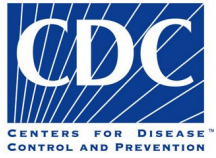
Recommendations:

- As training gaps vary from branch to branch, *workforce and professional development* should be a content area to focus on / consider for internal project officer survey to gain a broader understanding of training needs for project officers agency-wide.
  - o Also, as training needs are ongoing and ever-changing, it might be useful to query project officers in the internal project officer survey regarding training needs/satisfaction annually.
- Explore the availability or development of an easily identified "list" or formal catalog of trainings that are identified as critical, important or beneficial for project officers.
  - o Consider incorporating these trainings into the Project Officer Portal.
- As Project Officer of the Future was frequently mentioned, it may be beneficial to review the Project Officer of the Future curriculum to crosswalk identified competencies and training gaps to either replicate or expand the training to build upon the current success of the program.
- Examine Watsonian Society mentor program to assess success with their mentor program for collaboration and/or replication.

RECRUITMENT / RETENTION
The objective of this section is to collect information regarding recruitment and retention as well as any recommendations on career advancement opportunities for POs.

Most supervisors indicated that a majority of the positions for project officers were filled in their respective branches; those that did have current vacancies cited the extended HR process and/or inability to hire externally to be reasons the positions remain unfilled. Networking and internal transfers were the predominant methods/strategies used to attract highly qualified project officers and references to PHPS fellows were also often cited as another strategy in recruiting qualified POs. Overall, project officers often seek other positions due to personal development, promotional opportunities and/or seeking other job opportunities. Findings

indicated that while exit interviews were conducted with some departing staff, they were not routinely conducted with most agencies.

Findings:

- When vacancies do occur, project officers are reassigned among the STLTs to cover the gaps in coverage; due to grantees displeasure with frequent reassignments, many branches only attempt to reassign project officers when necessary.
- When able to hire externally, many branches cited that they do not have difficulty in recruiting applicants (regarding number of applicants), however those that make the certification, often do not have the specific skills they are hiring for.
- Due to current HR restrictions to hiring externally, leadership reported that internal hiring is effective, however it always leaves a vacancy somewhere in the system, which does not benefit the agency overall.

Recommendations:

- Explore the status of exit interviews across the agency to assess whether they are offered and/or conducted, whether these interviews are required or optional, and if there is a standardized agency-wide structure/format of these interviews. Additionally, it might be valuable to explore the possibility of an agency-wide database to collect, manage and analyze the exit interviews.
- As promotional opportunities were a frequent response as the basis for turn-over, begin to investigate methods/strategies to incorporate promotional opportunities into the current system (i.e., "career-banding", etc).
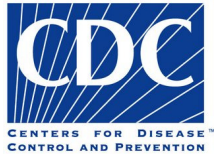
HIGHLIGHTING WORK
The objective of this section is to collect information on effective practices that may be highlighted in a CDC-wide event, etc.

An overall majority of both leadership and project officers indicated there is value in an award/recognition program and they would support this program, if implemented. An especially common theme within this discussion was the assertion that the nominations should stem from grantees or partners served by the project officer or that the nomination criteria should have both an internal (leadership) and external (grantee) perspective. Conversely, a number of project officers noted that perhaps an award should be given to a specific program area of project officers or include the entire cadre of project officers, as a whole, in place of individual awards. Those that did not feel there was value in an award program cited subjectivity of awards as the most common reason for dissent.
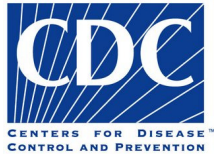
Findings:

- Both leadership and project officers had similar responses when asked what project officers in their respective programs do well. Common themes include:
    - Invested in work
    - Advocacy
    - Self-initiative
    - Systems-level thinking

- ▪ Collaboration/Cross sharing
- ▪ Jurisdictional knowledge
- Relationships and diversity of work were the most common themes elicited from responses concerning what project officers like about their job; Building and developing partnerships with grantees and "never getting bored" with "constantly evolving programs" were frequently cited by project officers across all agencies.
- A small number of participants mentioned CDC's Watsonian Society in connection with awards/recognizing project officers.

Recommendations:

- Examine Watsonian Society award program to build upon their existing successes in recognizing project officers or gaining insight to developing criteria to build a new award program (outside of Watsonian).
- Survey STLTs with question, "What do you think your project officers do exceptionally well….." to garner the external perspective of the key characteristics of successful project officers.
  - o Also, query STLTs, themselves, into what they feel makes an exceptional project officer.

PROJECT OFFICER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENT
FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
PROJECT OFFICERS

Purpose

The purpose of these focus group interviews is to gather a variety of information to understand and describe the various project officer service delivery models across CDC programs. Specifically, the objectives of this interview are:
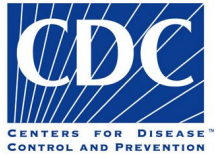
1. Identifying the similarities as well as the differences among these service delivery models including monitoring and assessing performance improvement among awardees;

2. Understanding the support systems (like mentoring programs, etc) and training resources that are available to project officers to support their professional and career development;

3. Understanding the kinds of challenges project officers face in their current positions; and

4. Obtain guidance on how CDC as an agency could best collect and/or highlight the work of project officers or networking opportunities that would support project officers.

Section 1: Workforce Profile – *The objective of this section is to collect information on and gain an understanding of the responsibilities, skills, knowledge and competencies required of the project officers.*

1. Describe your job responsibilities as a project officer for this program.

2. What skills, competencies or knowledge do you think are critical to be an effective project officer for this program?

3. What resources do you leverage to assist you with your work? (e.g., websites, print documents, other staff, etc.)

Section 2: Workforce Development – *The objective of this section is to collect information on the types of professional development required and/or available to Pos and any opportunities for career/professional advancement.*

4. What training programs are you **required or recommended** to complete? How often?

5. Are there any types of skills, knowledge or competencies that you would like to receive further training?

6. What other types of professional development (other than training courses such as professional conferences, mentoring programs) available to you*?*

7. What are some barriers to your professional development?

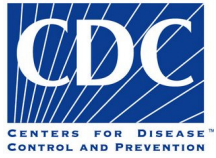8. What types of career advancement opportunities are available to you?

Section 3: Provision of TA to Awardees – *The objective of this section is to collect information on what, how, and when TA is identified / provided to awardees as well as information related to how performance improvement is managed.*

9. How many health departments do you currently support?

10. When supporting a cooperative agreement with a state, tribal, local, or territorial health department, who do you most often work with?

11. What type of support, guidance or technical assistance do you provide to the health departments? *[Distinguish between responsibilities related to administration/grants management activities versus programmatic aspects of the cooperative agreement.]*

12. How do you utilize other CDC staff as a resource to provide or support technical or scientific assistance to any of the awardees?

13. How often do you conduct a site visit with an awardee to provide technical assistance or to evaluate and monitor performance? Describe the a) goals of the site visit, b) how it is organized, c) who you typically meet with and why, d) documents you review or activities you observe, and e) any trip reports or follow up post site visit.

14. How do you evaluate the performance of each awardee? With whom and how is this communicated or shared?

15. How do you collect or identify leading practices or lessons learned among the awardees? How are these leading practices or lessons learned shared or used to support other awardees?

Section 4- Challenges / Highlighting Work - *The objective of this section is to collect information on effective practices that may be highlighted in a CDC-wide event, etc.*

16. What is the best part of your job as a Project Officer?

17. What do you think your program project officers do exceptionally well that you would recommend be shared with project officers in other branches or CIOs?

18. If CDC were to implement a program to formally recognize an "outstanding" project officer, would you have any suggestions for the types of qualities and/or competencies that should be evaluated as part of the selection criteria? Would you support this type of formal recognition award specifically for project officers?

PROJECT OFFICER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENT
FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
LEADERSHIP / SUPERVISORS

Purpose

The purpose of these focus group interviews is to gather a variety of information to understand and describe the various service delivery models to provide technical assistance (TA) and capacity building support to state, tribal, local, and territorial health departments by project officers across CDC programs. Specifically, the objectives of this interview are:

1. Identifying the similarities as well as the differences among these service delivery models including monitoring and assessing performance improvement among awardees;

2. Understanding the support systems (like mentoring programs, etc) and training resources that are available to project officers to support their professional and career development;

3. Understanding the kinds of challenges project officers face in their current positions; and

4. Obtain guidance on how CDC as an agency could best collect and/or highlight the work of project officers or networking opportunities that would support project officers.

Section 1: Definitions – *The objective of this section is to collect information on and gain an understanding of the terms and definitions used for the staff providing administrative oversight and TA for Cooperative Agreements.*

1. For those staff providing administrative oversight and technical assistance to awardees receiving a Cooperative Agreement funded through your program, do you refer to those staff as "Project Officers" or "Program Consultants", both or something else?

     a) Why? For you, what is the distinction between "project officers" versus "program consultants"?

Section 2: Service Delivery Models – *The objective of this section is to collect information on and gain an understanding of organizational structure and system in which TA is provided.*

2. How is your branch organized or structured to provide capacity building and technical assistance to the awardees?

3. How do you ensure that project officers/program consultants provide consistent, timely and accurate TA to the awardees?

4. What types of system(s) do you have in place for an awardee to request capacity building or TA? How do you monitor and/or track the types of TA requested by awardees?

5. How does your branch/program identify and communicate leading practices regarding TA?

6. How do you monitor or evaluate the STLT satisfaction with the type and amount of TA or capacity building support they receive from their project officer/program consultant?

Section 3: Workforce Expectations / Responsibilities – *The objective of this section is to collect information on and gain an understanding of the responsibilities, skills, knowledge and competencies required of the project officers.*

7. What do you see as the primary duties and expectations of project officers?

8. For those project officers/program consultants that you view as leaders or models in your branch, what qualities differentiate them from the rest of the staff? Why do they "stand out" as leaders or models for the other staff?

Section 4: Workforce Development – *The objective of this section is to collect information on the types of professional development required and/or available to POs.*

9. What training programs/courses are **required or recommended** for your project officers/program consultants to complete? How often?

10. Are there other types of professional development activities (other than training such as conferences, mentoring programs, etc.) that you encourage your project officers / program consultants to participate or access?

11. What training gaps exist for your project officers/program consultants?

Section 5: Recruitment / Retention – *The objective of this section is to collect information regarding recruitment and retention as well as any recommendations on career advancement opportunities for POs.*

12. Do you currently have any open positions for project officers/program consultants?

    a) Are there any challenges or barriers in recruiting highly qualified project officers / program consultants?

13. What strategies do you use to attract highly qualified project officers/program consultants?

14. What is the turn-over rate of your project officers / program consultants?

    a) From your experiences, what is the most common reason is for project officers/program consultants to seek other positions?

15. Do you have any recommendations (in terms of strategy, policy, promotions, etc.) that the CDC should consider for recruitment or to retain staff and create stability in programs?

Section 6: Highlighting Work - *The objective of this section is to collect information on effective practices that may be highlighted in a CDC-wide event, etc.*

16. What do you think your project officers/program consultants do exceptionally well that you would recommend be shared with other CIO project officers?

17. If CDC were to implement a program to formally recognize an "outstanding" project officer/program consultant, what qualities and/or competencies should be evaluated as part of the selection criteria? Would you support this type of formal recognition award specifically for project officers/program consultants?