

**CDC Public Health Crisis Response Co-Ag: Public Health Workforce
Request for Funding**

PROJECT NARRATIVE AND WORKPLAN

Project #: *(DSHS use only)*

Project Lead/Point of Contact

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Project Title: Public Health Crisis Response Co-Ag: Fort Bend County Public Health Workforce Development

Amount of Funds Requested:
\$ 2,000,000

Expected Impact (geography/population/other):

Like many health departments in our state and nation, Fort Bend County's public health workforce has not kept pace with the population growth within our County. At the start of the pandemic, the health department was not fully addressing several public health responsibilities in our county. In addition, the health department has not been able to complete a community health needs assessment since 2007 due to the lack of personnel and the competing responsibilities of addressing the essential public health functions and emergency response without adequate professional, administrative, and support staff. The additional staff will allow FBCHHS to begin to identify, prioritize and address the public health needs of a county approaching a population of 900,000 residents. The COVID-19 pandemic served to highlight weaknesses in the public health infrastructure in the county as well as the health inequities between communities. Although the county, as a whole, appears to be above average in wealth, education and other key economic and health indicators, there are wide discrepancies between communities at the sub-county level. The expected impact of this funding opportunity is to strengthen the basic infrastructure of the local health department and with analysis, specific initiatives and strategic partnerships to reduce the burden of COVID-19 and other health conditions for the county and specifically those communities with higher SVI and more health inequity.

Partners Coordinating With:

- UT School of Public Health
- The George Foundation
- Henderson-Wessendorff Foundation
- Fort Bend ISD
- Lamar Consolidated ISD
- Texana Center (MHMR / Mental Health Authority)
- AccessHealth Federally Qualified Health Center
- Fort Bend County Behavioral Health Services
- Fort Bend County Social Services
- Fort Bend County Collaborative Information System (a collaborative of social service agencies)

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Workplan - *Provide a plan that describes in detail, how your entity will accomplish all activities proposed for this project. Include key staff, experience, and resources available to complete the project. The plan must also describe a clear method for evaluating the services that will be provided, including identification of a specific evaluation standard, as well as recommendations or plans for improving essential public health services delivery based on the results of the evaluation. (Initiation, Implementation and Evaluation of Project):*

Assessments and Data Analysis:

Expertise in formulating and analyzing large community data sets was lacking at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. From no local funding for epidemiology, to no skilled data analysts, the department struggled to address the community, disease and vaccine data needs in addressing the pandemic. Some funding sources provided short term data experts and a partnership was developed with the closest school of public health. Moving forward with this workforce initiative, the local health department intends to maintain the partnership with the school of public health and to hire a Health Data Analyst to strengthen internal capacity to build and analyze data sets that will continue to inform the response to COVID-19, identify communities where the greatest impact is felt and to provide in depth analysis of SVI and other markers of inequities that must be addressed. The County has made strides to improve data collection and analysis with the hiring of an Epidemiology Division Manager, and this Health Data Analyst will strengthen that Division. As the department moves forward to complete a Community Health Assessment, this analyst position will allow for deeper analysis of the factors causing health inequities and greater disease burden from health emergencies such as COVID-19.

Evaluation of the effectiveness of this position and the work plan around it will be in available reports, meetings with key partners to share and compare data and the ability of the health department to clearly speak to inequities and areas of health concerns across the county. A key deliverable will be the Community Health Assessment.

Epidemiology Collaboration with Environmental Health:

As noted above, the local health department has relied on epidemiological expertise provided by grant funding. With this funding initiative, the department will hire a Registered Sanitarian within the Environmental Health Division to strengthen the capacity of both the Environmental Health and Epidemiology Divisions to recognize and respond to food-borne illness outbreaks in the community as well as COVID-19 and other potential widespread infectious/communicable disease outbreaks that may result from environmental conditions. Periodic meetings between epidemiology, environmental health and health department leadership will monitor this cross-division collaboration and direct efforts to improve the enhanced surveillance efforts. An evaluation of the investigations, data and public health interventions provided by this new position and resulting collaboration will be provided in departmental reports.

Strengthen Ability to Promote Wellness and Prevent Disease in Hard-to-Reach Populations:

Noted during the COVID-19 pandemic, there are communities within the county which are not receiving the same level of prevention and care as others. There are many reasons for these inequities, many of which will be identified and analyzed with our Community Health Assessment and specific analyses of SVI and other markers. As communities are identified and potential interventions identified, the addition of a Community Paramedic, Public Health Nurse and Community Health Education Specialist with expertise in these interventions and

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with appropriate ability to outreach into these communities will be hired to provide core public health services in these areas. Testing and vaccination for COVID-19 and other diseases will be provided as well as culturally appropriate education campaigns in coordination with the mobile health unit and the communications team. There will need to be special focus on diversity, equity and inclusion in hiring this outreach team to be sure that the specific needs of communities are met. Evaluation of outreach activities will include number of outreach opportunities, number of attendees, services provided and a comparison of these outreach efforts to previous activities in these harder-to-reach communities.

Establishment of a Chronic Disease Division:

Fort Bend County Health & Human Services has not previously focused on or addressed chronic diseases in the community. With the implementation of the 1115 Waiver activities, the needs of those with chronic diseases, but without resources became increasingly evident. In addition, the burden of chronic diseases on the health care industry and on employers is well documented. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many with chronic diseases lost linkage to care or lost insurance due to employment loss and missed diagnoses and disease progression resulted. With the workforce expansion initiative, Fort Bend County will move forward to establish a Chronic Disease Division with the hiring of a Medical Director for the division. Other new positions within this initiative, such as the community paramedic, public health nurse and community health education specialist will also work with this Division to address chronic disease inequities in the community along with other public health concerns.

Evaluation of activities will include ongoing reporting of the successes in reaching particularly the harder-to reach populations, but also in the number and success of community wide initiatives to educate and prevent chronic diseases in the community especially addressing the loss of ongoing care during the pandemic. An overview of the Chronic Disease burden in the community will be included in the Community Health Assessment.

Address Mental Health Needs in the Community:

During the COVID-19 pandemic, mental health needs were highlighted in departmental discussions throughout. From the issues of isolation, to results of loss of employment and loss of family members to COVID, the inability to find assistance was noted in calls to hotlines and other professionals. In collaboration with social services, behavioral health services and schools, the local health department intends to establish activities to address this gap. To spearhead this effort, the department intends to hire a Behavioral Health Professional such as someone with LCSW or LPC credentials to develop a program of activities and support with the various partners in the community to address ongoing mental health needs as a result of COVID-19 and those that will occur as other public health crises occur. Focus on the hard-to-reach populations will be included in this initiative.

Evaluation of the program will involve reporting of collaborations and program activities developed.

Establish the foundations for a vector control program:

During the response for COVID-19 the health department also has provided investigations and response for potential vector-borne disease. The current investigation and response program is loosely coordinated between the epidemiology staff, the emergency preparedness staff and the actual surveillance and vector control staff within the County's

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Road and Bridge department. In municipalities and HOAs within the county there are numerous unrelated activities ongoing. The county intends to hire an additional Emergency Planner to focus on coordination of these efforts in identification of vectors and vector-borne disease, and to initiate appropriate public health preparedness and response. Activities will include coordination meetings across the various vector control organizations in the county and specifically with information gathering and provision such as public education, enhanced mapping capacity, and development of protocols for mitigation. Evaluation will include progress towards a coordinated plan for addressing vector borne disease across the county with a focus on activities during COVID-19.

Milestones/Tasks/Activities to include Proposed Timeline for each Activity:

- Formation of the Health Equity Team – August 15, 2021
- Job Descriptions: During the period of time from application to contract, the department will develop job descriptions for the new positions and have them evaluated for grade by Human Resources
- Court Approval: At the time of award, the positions will be presented for approval to the Commissioners Court
- Job Postings: After approval from Commissioners Court.
- Hiring of New Positions: Target Date - September 1, 2021 (exception MD/DO by January 1, 2022)
- Identification of communities showing social vulnerability – September 1, 2021
- Community Health Assessment - September 1, 2022
- Epidemiology/Environmental Health Collaboration plan – December 1, 2021
- Outreach Team Plan, to include mobile unit – October 1, 2021
- Chronic Disease Division established – January 1, 2022
- Mental Health/Behavioral Health support system – January 1, 2022 initiated
- Vector Control program initiated – January 1, 2022
- Programmatic review of all progress each quarter (reported to DSHS each six months)

Health Equity - *Identify metrics to address Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in hiring.*

- *Hiring staff*
- *Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) relevant training*
- *Establish a health equity team to focus on hiring a workforce that represents the diversity in the communities being served*

Fort Bend County is one of the more diverse counties in the US when considered Race and Ethnicity. This is not true of economic status where the county is generally on the high end of the scale with recognition of areas of poverty existing. There are a high number of languages and dialects spoken across the county and a mix of immigration generations, with many first-generation immigrants and also many who are descendants of the early settlers in Texas. These factors along with others will need to be taken into account when considering the staff who may be hired to reach out to the harder-to-reach populations in the county. DEI considerations will need to be made from where to post and reach out for candidates to assurance of equity in hiring and team building.

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Metrics to be considered include:

Gender Identity, Race, Ethnicity, and also characteristics identified in analysis of communities with disproportionate impact from COVID-19.

The department will establish a Health Equity Team charged with the following:

- determination of relevant metrics for diversity in hiring the new personnel
- working with Human Resources and department leadership to provide training for all health department staff in issues related to diversity, equity and inclusivity
- conducting an assessment of the DEI status of the health department in general to inform future recruiting, hiring and training needs.

The Health Equity team will consist of the Health Equity Manager, representatives from the various divisions within the health department and from various levels within the department from receptionist to executive leadership. Reports from the findings and activities of the Health Equity Team will be discussed in the quarterly review of all funded activities from this funding source (PH Crisis Co-ag) and provided to DSHS in the semi-annual reports.

Proposed Staff to be Hired:

of Administrative Support staff:

of Professional or Clinical staff: 5

Division Manager for Chronic Disease Program (MD/DO)

Behavioral Health Specialist for mental health support (LCSW/LPC)

Public Health Nurse

Community Health Education Specialist

Community Paramedic

of Disease Investigation staff: 3

Health Data Analyst (analysis of investigation and community data)

Registered Sanitarian (food-borne/environmental disease)

Emergency Planner (vector-borne disease)

of School Health staff:

of Program Management staff:

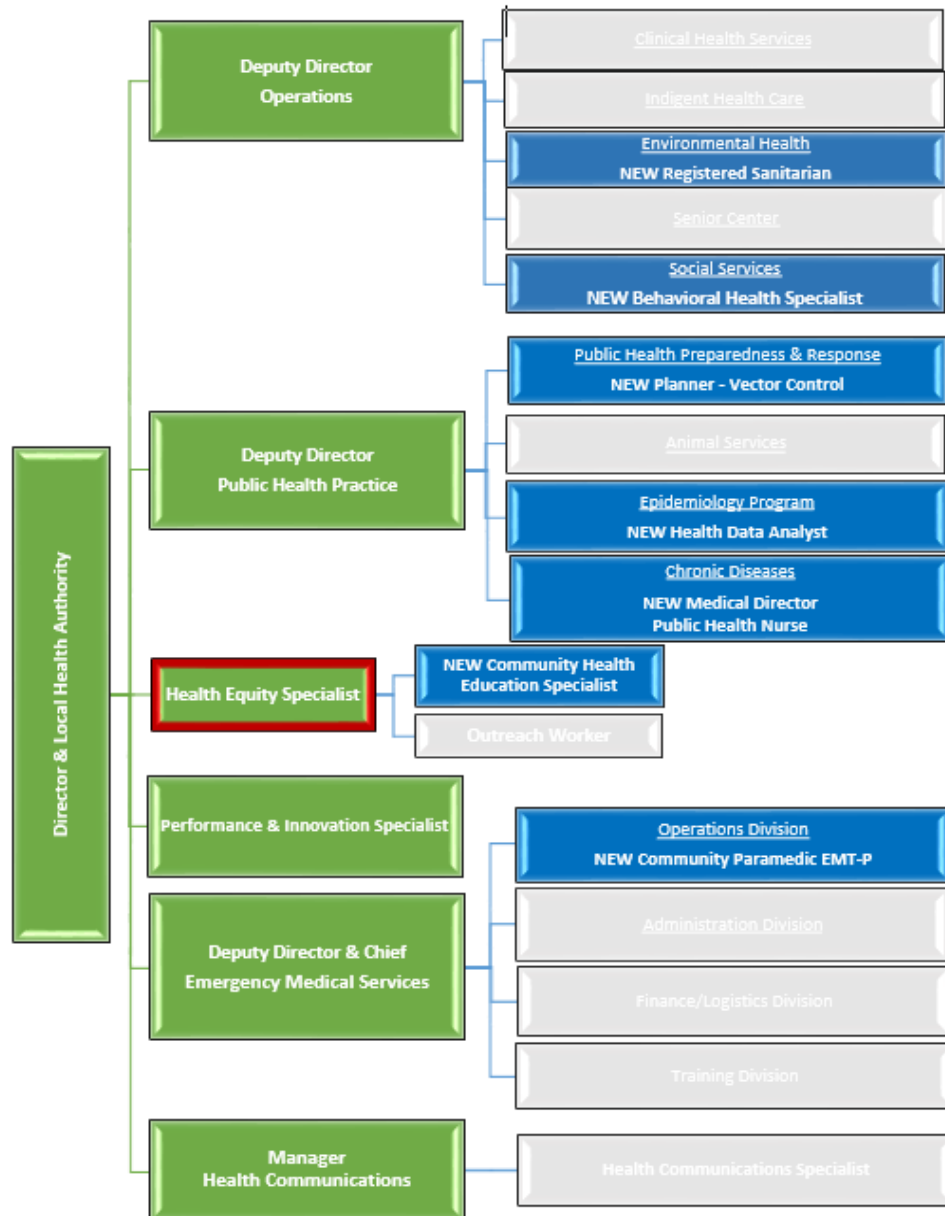
**** Provide general job descriptions for positions in budget template ****

**** Provide an Organization Chart highlighting the new positions ****

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Organizational Chart—Health & Human Services Administration'

PROPOSED—PHWG-Funded-Positions¶



Provide Mitigation Plans to Address Challenges in Meeting Hiring Goals:

As with many public health positions, there is sometimes a delay in finding suitable candidates, and in paying salaries commensurate with private entities. Where delays are expected, additional outreach to universities and colleges, professional organizations and other health partners will be used to broadcast the positions further afield. If needed, temporary or contractual positions can be used to provide faster response and for those potential candidates who wish a more flexible commitment.