



Laboratory System Improvement Program

Mission

To establish a system that measures the performance of state public health systems and supports their continuous improvement.

Vision

A healthy world through improved public health practice and highly functioning and effective laboratory systems.

Program Overview

National emergency preparedness work has demonstrated the importance of developing and refining public health “systems” at the national, state and local levels and for assuring that those systems are as consistent and seamless as possible. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in partnership with a number of national associations, developed national performance standards for state and local public health systems, as well as for local public health governance boards. To assess performance of state public health laboratory systems, CDC partnered with the Association of Public Health Laboratories (APHL) to create the Laboratory System Improvement Program (L-SIP), formerly known as the State Public Health Laboratory Systems Performance Standards Program. This program provides a user-friendly process, including a performance assessment tool for assessing and establishing a baseline measure of performance.

The tool is based on the following framework and concepts: 1) the 10 essential public health services¹, 2) the 11 core functions and capabilities of state public health laboratories², 3) a system focus, 4) measuring against gold standards and 5) a commitment to quality improvement.

A nationally-developed set of public health laboratory performance standards provides the following benefits to public health laboratories and their stakeholders:

- A means for strengthening relationships with public health, clinical and other laboratories and partners that comprise the broader laboratory system;
- A framework for continuous improvement of public health laboratory systems;
- A concrete way to educate system partners and elected officials about the public health laboratory system;
- A practical tool to help identify areas in need of advocacy and increased resources;
- A means to help formalize the National Laboratory System around the country, with potential inclusion of veterinary, agricultural and environmental laboratories; and
- Support for the planned process for accreditation of state public health laboratories.

The tool and process were validated through pilot projects and feedback, and the implementation phase began in 2007. Since the beginning of program development, more than 25 states across the nation have been involved through committee work, piloting the tool, field testing the tool and the process or participating as an assessment site. Sixteen states have completed an L-SIP assessment to date. Our experience with preparedness has taught us that inclusion of partners in a system approach to providing public health services strengthens services and improves outcomes.



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Inclusion of laboratory partners in system approaches at the state level is achieving similar outcomes.

What's Available?

To assist in planning and executing a state public health laboratory system assessment, the following is available from APHL:

- **User's Guide** includes a description of the program, examples of the laboratory system, program framework, explanation of the process, recommendations of who to include and materials to provide as well as suggestions for facilitators, theme takers and next steps. The guide contains sample materials, including letters and agendas.
- **The Assessment Tool** includes a section for each of the 10 essential services as they relate to the laboratory system. The tool is accompanied by a helpful glossary and a spreadsheet-based scoring tool.
- **Technical Assistance** via multimedia trainings for assessment coordinators, facilitators and theme takers and conference calls.

New Resource Available Online

The Online Resource Center (ORC), which launched in January 2009, provides states with a searchable online database of quality improvement resources. Users can search by essential public health services, their supporting indicators, cross-cutting themes or keywords. Users are also encouraged to contribute quality improvement materials to the ORC by completing an easy-to-use online form.

Quotes from Colleagues

"This will be an excellent tool to move us toward standardization of our public health laboratory activities and to clearly define for us and our stakeholders the important role our laboratories play in the larger public health system. It's been said many times in the past, 'If you've seen one state public health laboratory, you've seen one state public health laboratory.' In the future, with these performance standards in place, we'll be able to say, 'If you've seen one state public health laboratory, you know how all these laboratories nationwide contribute to a strong local, state and national public

health system."—Norman Crouch, PhD, assistant commissioner (retired), Health Protection Bureau, Minnesota Department of Health

"Meeting with our partners at the L-SIP assessment helped us all to learn that we are part of a laboratory system. We now feel ready to move forward with the vision of developing capacity to meet or exceed national performance standards."—Anne Weber, MS, bureau chief, Montana Laboratory Services Bureau, Department of Public Health

"This assessment process enlightened our partners as to the depth and diversity of our services here at the Scientific Laboratory Services. It was interesting to observe the group change their thinking from customer-client format to a system format. We also realized that we need to be more proactive in communicating with all of our partners. One step that we have taken is developing a newsletter that contains information from all aspects of our laboratory that we distribute three times per year."—Twila R. Kunde, MBA, MPH, deputy director, Scientific Laboratory Division, New Mexico Department of Health

"One benefit of the process was the process itself. It provided an opportunity to build relationships with other contributors to the system, and to ask questions such as:

- What is my role in the system?
- Do we need to change the system? Is it worthwhile to do so, and if so do we need a formal process or an informal process to do so?
- What parts of system were not represented today?"—Paul Silverman, DrPH, Delaware Division of Public Health deputy director

Contact

Generally, it is recommended that the state public health laboratory (SPHL) acts as the lead agency in convening the assessment. If you are from an SPHL interested in participating in this program, contact Tina Su, MPH, at 240.485.2729 or bertina.su@aphl.org. For more information, visit www.aphl.org/lcip.

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¹ Public Health Functions Steering Committee: Public Health in America. July 1994.

² Core Functions and Capabilities of State Public Health Laboratories: A Report of the Association of Public Health Laboratories (CDC 20sep02).