



# THE SHO-CASE STUDY

STATE HEALTH OFFICIALS  
CAREER ACHIEVEMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY EVALUATION

## STATE HEALTH OFFICIAL POCKET GUIDE

This guide is based on the collective insights from 147 current and former State and Territorial Health Officials and Commissioners (referred to collectively as SHOs).

This guide provides information to support SHOs in their work with Governors and their teams, the public health workforce, and the community.



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# Actionable Tasks

Things develop and change quickly.



## MOVE

Time is a priority. Identify your agenda as a SHO and focus deliberately toward that agenda.



## ACT

Be inspired by goals that you can set and share.



## USE DATA WISELY

Make evidence-based decisions, but don't wait for perfect information.

# Actionable Tasks

- [ ] Establish a clear understanding of the governor's priorities and expectations
- [ ] Work with the governor and the chief of staff to establish a process for providing an early heads up on emerging issues
- [ ] As early as possible, become oriented as to the SHOs role in emergency preparedness and response and your statutory responsibilities.
- [ ] Establish a relationship with new and existing members of the senior leadership team and lead subject matter experts
- [ ] Utilize the collective knowledge of the senior leadership team and lead subject matter experts to:
  - Identify and establish a rapport with key stakeholders and partners
  - Understand agency structure and how the agency relates to other governmental entities
  - Develop or revise the existing agency communications plan for elevating emerging issues as well as highlight the agency's accomplishments

# What Former SHOs Wish They Had Known



## Political Processes

- How to relate to Governor's Office
- How best to relate to Governor's senior staff
- Better understand and influence the legislative process



## How State Government Works

- Understand the public health financing system (federal, state, local funds) and how to defend the agency's budget
- Get insight into how your state government processes work including how the state appropriation process works and how the governor's executive budget is developed
- Overcoming silo issues, changing organizational culture, and workforce development strategies



## Partnership Development Approaches

- Cross-sectoral partnership development approaches
- Ways to work more effectively with other agencies of state government
- Better comprehension of relationships with the federal government including grants and other policy issues

# Success Insights

- Understand the difference between the urgent and the important. SHOs do not have the luxury to ignore anything.
- Set a Google alert for yourself and your agency for immediate notification of news.
- Protect the people who are doing the work and give your team credit where it is due.
- Have your administrative assistant build 'thinking time' into your schedule.
- Prioritize 'self care' for you and your family. A successful work/life balance is enabled by the team approach. Model the practices you want your team to employ. Consider using delayed sending feature for emails to be sent only during work hours.

## How SHOs define success

1. Transformed organizational culture of agency
2. Positive changes in health status of populations
3. Improved relationships/credibility
4. Improved public health infrastructure
5. No scandals or fraud in your agency during your tenure



## Ongoing procedures most useful to SHO success

1. Regular meetings with senior agency staff
2. Articulating a strategic plan and/or agency priorities
3. External constituency speeches and meetings
4. Management by "walking around"
5. Have a few good ideas ready for when a window of opportunity presents itself



# Success Insights

## Job functions SHOs believe they should spend their time on for greatest impact



1. Developing new public health policies/statutes
2. Meeting with external constituencies
3. Interacting with the governor's office
4. Developing strategic and operating plans
5. Developing relationships with key legislators

## Most helpful sources of professional support



1. Other senior health agency staff
2. Senior deputy
3. ASTHO resources
4. Outside stakeholders
5. Informal and confidential group of trusted advisors
6. Know the SHOs who serve under your governor's closest governor friends

## Most useful team building approaches



1. Create a culture where your staff feel comfortable telling you something bad and routinely ask "what else do I need to know"
2. Spend time with your staff
3. Adjustments in structure of team
4. Establish clear performance expectations and metrics



## Survival Tips

**SHO tenure is the shortest it has ever been so don't delay action.**

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Currently, SHO tenures are the shortest they have ever been. This matters because shorter tenures have implications for what SHOs can achieve toward the organization and the goals of public health. This guide provides insight to support SHOs in making the most of their important leadership roles and to accomplish all that they set out to do during their tenures.

- Don't go it alone! Connect early with ASTHO and mentors who can support you in your crucial role.
- Immediately get an understanding of state public disclosure laws as they relate to you and your family. Everything you do and write is public information. Do not use personal emails for official state business.
- Check your investments for conflicts of interest.
- Get to know the governor's legislative director and the state's legislative process as soon as possible.

# 5 Points of Effective Risk Communication

## 1. Don't over reassure (err on the alarming side)

A high estimate of harm modified downward is much more acceptable to the public than a low estimate of harm modified upward.

## 2. State continued concern before stating reassuring updates

"Although we're not out of the woods yet, we have seen a declining number of cases each day this week."

## 3. Confidence vs. uncertainty

Instead of making promises about outcomes, express the uncertainty of the situation and a confident belief in the "process" to fix the problem and address public safety concerns.

## 4. Give people things to do - Anxiety is reduced by action and a restored sense of control

Share the single most important action for self-protection and perhaps recommend a 3-part action plan

- You must do X
- You should do Y
- You can do Z

## 5. Allow people the right to feel fear

Don't pretend they are not afraid, and don't tell them they shouldn't be. Acknowledge the fear, and give contextual information.



**Only say what you know – don't speculate.**

**Always give the governor the option to release good news.**