

WPHA Survey to Assess Member Learning Needs
Workforce Development Committee
April 2008

Executive Summary

The Wisconsin Public Health Association (WPHA) Workforce Development Committee conducted a survey of members' learning needs in January 2008. The survey was conducted on Zoomerang and was completed by 117 of 387 members who had an E-mail address on file (30%). Results indicated that factors such as cost and timing of conferences were the leading factors related to conference attendance. Multiple suggestions were made for improving the conference, including broadening the theme and including more in-depth sessions. Respondents hoped that future conferences would include more on policy development.

Introduction

The Wisconsin Public Health Association (WPHA) Workforce Development Committee (former Education Committee) wanted to ensure that as WPHA membership expands, we have a clear understanding of our membership's learning needs. The first step in this process was asking WPHA members to complete a short survey. The survey results will:

- Drive the content and format for the annual conference (2009 and beyond)
- Determine how information about educational opportunities are distributed to WPHA members
- Be shared with WPHA partners who offer educational opportunities.

Method

The WPHA Member Continuing Education Survey was distributed to the WPHA membership through the WPHA Communicate Express, posted on the WPHA Web site and through a direct E-mail to 387 WPHA members who had E-mail addresses on file. WPHA members include individuals, agencies and friends of WPHA. The survey was completed by 117 WPHA members for a response rate of 30%.

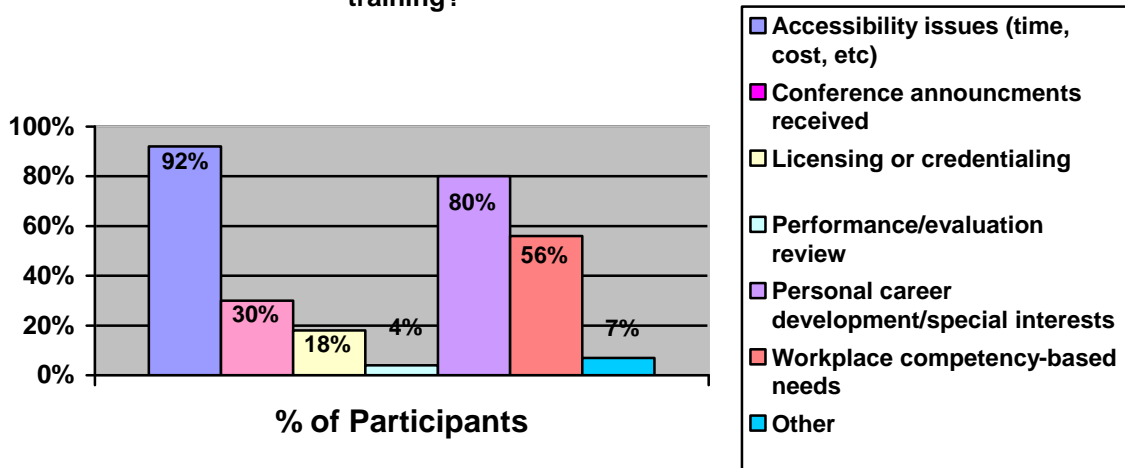
This survey had twelve questions, three about education and training in general, one about communication from WPHA and eight questions specific to the annual Public Health conference.

Results and Discussion

What factors influence your decisions about education and training?

Respondents were asked to select three factors that influence their decisions about participating in educational activities. The greatest number of aggregated responses (92%) were related to accessibility issues (i.e. cost, time, etc), personal career development or interests, and workplace competency-based needs. Fewer people indicated that licensing or credentialing requirements influence their decisions, which may reflect that Wisconsin does not currently require continuing education for registered nurses. In addition, the small number of respondents who selected performance evaluation/review factors may indicate that employee evaluations are not yet linked to public health core competencies. Issues related to cost were listed an additional three times for respondents who selected "Other". Figure 1 below describes the results in detail.

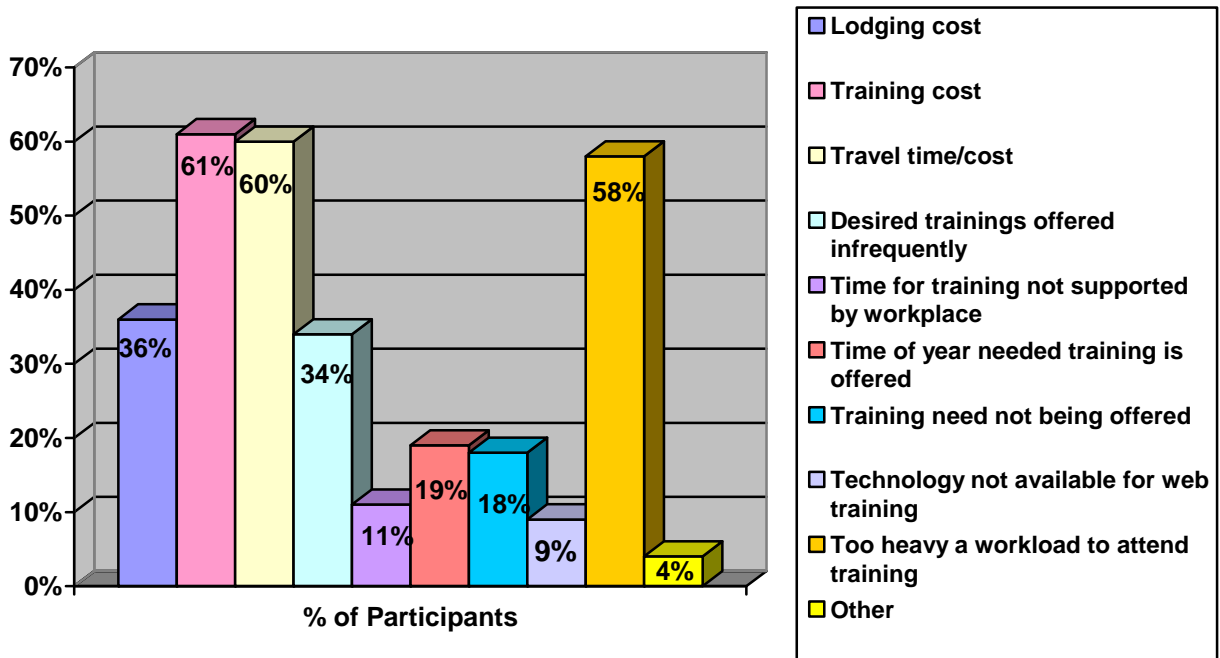
Figure 1. What factors influence your decisions about education/training?



What are your barriers to receiving continuing education?

Respondents were asked to select all barriers that apply. WPHA member responses suggest that cost (lodging, travel, training) is a major factor, accounting for over 45% of total responses. Two additional respondents who selected “Other” also listed issues associated with cost. Too heavy a workload, which prevents people from taking time away from the workplace, also was selected as a major barrier to participating in continuing education. Figure 2 describes the results in detail.

Figure 2. What are your barriers to receiving continuing education?



What could be done to remove any barriers?

Of the 71 responses collected for this question, 38 responses (54%) were related to access including cost, frequency, and distance/location of programs. Another 34 responses (48%) related to the availability of web/distance education. The Workforce Development Committee members found this result to be surprising as their past experiences led them to believe that web and distance-based education is not highly utilized. Based on these findings, the committee will need to learn more about how to best offer and engage WPHA members in web/distance education.

How would you like WPHA to inform you about public health educational opportunities?

Respondents were asked to check all responses that apply to them. The overwhelming majority of respondents (80%) selected “Individual E-mails about training events as they come up.” Sixty-eight percent indicated they would like this information to be distributed through the “WPHA Communique/Communique Express.” WPHA Web site postings option was selected by only 33% of respondents, which may indicate that members do not regularly check the WPHA Web site for information.

Annual Conference

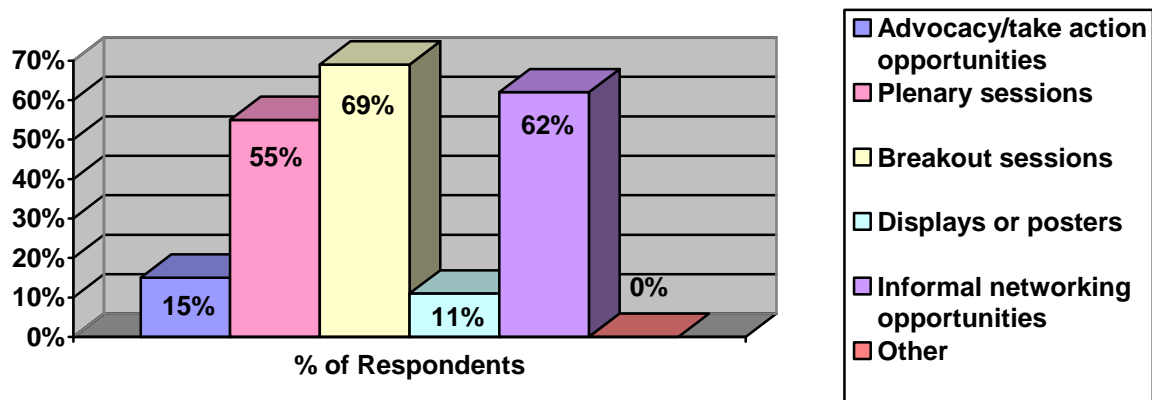
Do you usually attend the annual statewide Public Health conference sponsored by WPHA?

A total of 73% of respondents indicated they do usually attend the annual statewide Public Health Conference co-sponsored by WPHA, but only 52% indicated they attended the 2007 annual conference. The percentage of respondents indicating they would attend the 2008 conference jumped back up to 79%.

What do you feel are the most valuable aspects of the conference?

Those respondents who answered “Yes” to usually attending the statewide Public Health Conference were asked to select only two aspects of the conference they find most valuable. The majority of respondents indicated the sessions (plenary and breakout) along with informal networking opportunities are most valuable. The small number of respondents selecting “Advocacy/take action opportunities” may reflect that members have been unaware of the few opportunities available during past conferences, but does not necessarily indicate a lack of interest in these opportunities. Also, the small number of respondents selecting displays/posters could suggest that while members may find them valuable, they are not as valuable as plenaries, breakouts or networking. Figure 3 describes the results in detail.

Figure 3. What do you feel are the most valuable aspects of the conference?

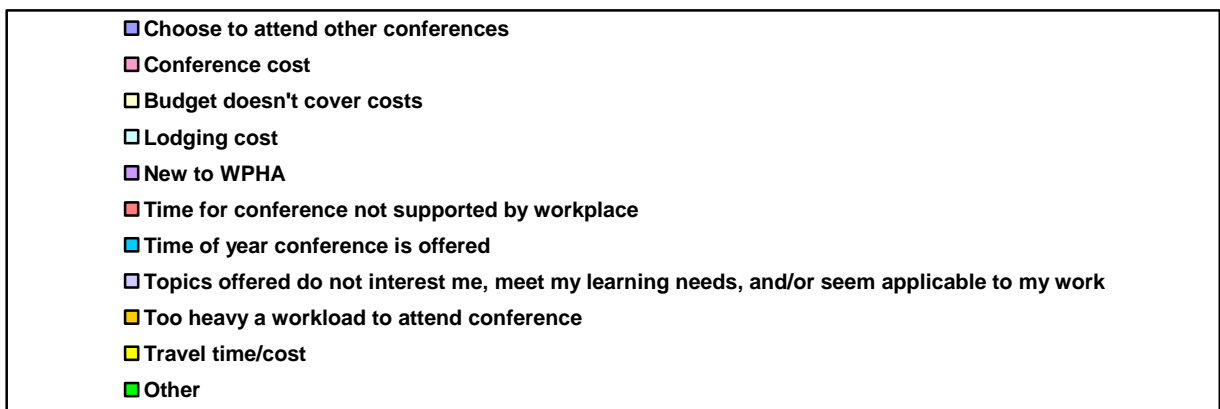
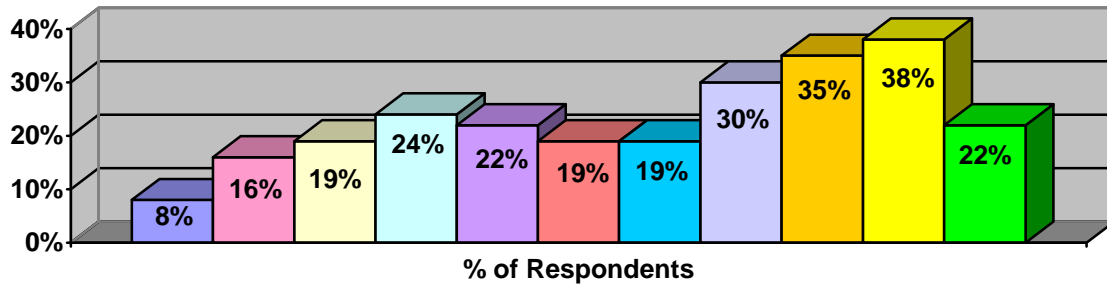


If you do not usually attend the annual conference, why not?

Those respondents who answered “No” were asked to check all the reasons they do not attend. Responses covered the full range of options, but generally mirrored responses to the earlier question regarding barriers to participation in continuing education opportunities. Costs related to

travel and registration along with content that is not of interest were selected most frequently from the list of items presented. When the responses for workload and costs are combined they account for 73% of the barriers. Figure 4 describes the results in detail.

Figure 4. If you do not usually attend the annual conference, why not?



Please suggest ways that WPHA could improve the annual conferences.

Members wrote in short answers to this question and shared many ideas (some conflicting) about how to improve the annual conference. Themes that emerged from the comments include:

- Broaden the theme of the conference
- Offer more in-depth sessions on targeted issues
- Bring in national speakers who are engaging, motivational and entertaining
- Expand content to be of interest to public health members, beyond the governmental and public health nursing workforce
- Offer more hands-on, interactive breakout sessions

Did you attend the 2007 annual conference in Appleton?

Fifty-two percent of respondents indicated they did attend the 2007 annual conference.

If you attended the 2007 conference, please comment on one or two things you learned or experienced there that you have been able to apply to your work. Of the many responses, two major themes emerged, including public health preparedness information and the opportunities for networking with colleagues. The comments around networking mirror the response to the questions about what members feel are the most valuable aspects of the annual conferences.

If you attended the 2007 conference, what were you hoping to learn or experience there, but did not? The majority of respondents noted the conference was too long ago to recall. Those who could remember specific conference activities offered a broad range of responses, but no major themes emerged.

Please list any content, presenters and/or activities you would like to see at future conferences (2009 and beyond).

Members were very generous in their responses to this question. They suggested a number of potential speakers and several content themes emerged. They included:

- Public health policy, including both legislative and system policy change
- Partnership/coalition building
- Marketing
- Workforce competency-based professional development
- The future of public health (financing, health care reform, etc).

The data collected in the Public Health Nursing (PHN) Competency Assessment in 2007 (http://www.son.wisc.edu/leap/activities/reports/BaselineCompSurvey_ExecSummary_032608.pdf) may answer why WPHA members desire a greater amount of public health policy, advocacy and take action opportunities at the annual Public Health conference, even when it wasn't listed as the most valuable aspect of the conference. On a 5-point Likert scale, public health staff nurse respondents indicated a 2.31 aggregate comfort level (respondents only feel capable of this with help) with Policy and Planning activities. This could suggest that Public Health conference attendees need additional training to participate in this area.

Conclusion

The survey, conducted to assess WPHA members' learning needs, had a response rate of 30%. Respondents indicated both individual and system factors that affect their education and training choices, including cost (cash and opportunity), workload and personal interests. Even with those challenges, over three-quarters of respondents indicated they usually attend the WPHA Annual Conference. Nevertheless, barriers will need to be addressed if attendance is to be maintained.

While not discussed explicitly above, the Member Learning Needs survey responses for all questions may be considered from two perspectives. The survey highlights issues that affect both (a) individuals and (b) local and state public health systems. For example, cost was cited as a factor that influences individual decisions about training and stretches individual and/or organizational budgets for lodging, training and travel expenses. Distance learning is a matter of personal preference and availability in the system. These results reveal strong interest on the part of members, while experience indicates that this approach has not been widely utilized, suggesting that there may be additional barriers in the public health system.

One result with more system implications is heavy workload. Fifty-eight percent (58%) cited this issue as a barrier to receiving continuing education in general (Figure 2), while 38% identified heavy workload as a reason for not attending the annual Public Health conference (Figure 4). Approaches to eliminating barriers to continuing education in general, and to attendance at the annual conference in particular, will need to address issues of cost, workload, and program types from the individual and system levels.

Respondents also provided an array of suggestions for improving future conference, and specific recommendations for what they would like to see at future conference. These comments will be of significant benefit in planning future conferences. However, extracting meaningful data about what members learned, or hoped to learn at the 2007 conference, was difficult given the elapsed amount of time. Future conference committees may want to consider implementing a 6- or 8-week post-conference follow-up evaluation, in addition to the evaluation completed on site.

Next Steps

The survey results are being shared with the WPHA membership. The Workforce Development Committee encourages WPHA members to share results, particularly those related to questions 1-3 with colleagues or organizations that might be interested in this information. Detailed results

of questions 5-13 that relate specifically to the annual Public Health conference are being reviewed by the Workforce Development Committee and shared with future annual conference planning committees. This information is in addition to the conference evaluation that is collected annually from conference attendees.

The assessment of WPHA member learning needs will be a continual process. The Workforce Development Committee encourages WPHA members to provide feedback and recommendations so we can better serve the membership.

Please contact Kristen Grimes (kgrimes@chw.org), Co-Chair, Workforce Development Committee if you have any questions regarding this report or to join the Workforce Development Committee. Thank you!