

**WHATCOM COALITION FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES
COMMISSIONED REPORT**

**THE HEALTHY COMMUNITIES NETWORK
PLANNING GRANT REPORT
June 2004**

Submitted To:

Whatcom Coalition for Healthy Communities
1511 Cornwall Ave Bellingham, WA 98225

Submitted By:

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

Whatcom Coalition for Healthy Communities (WCHC) is a private nonprofit organization with a mission of improving the long-term health and vitality of Whatcom County. The Whatcom Coalition engaged the Healthy Communities Foundation (HCF) in a planning grant to assess the requirements for implementing the HCF information system within Whatcom County. The HCF information system, called the Healthy Communities Network (HCN), is a web-based service designed to track and manage quality of life issues within a community, promote community health, and ultimately, improve community health.

The work conducted during the planning grant included onsite meetings with staff from WCHC and a cross section of important local stakeholders (see complete participant list in Appendix B). For the planning grant, the HCF conducted follow-up phone calls; epidemiological research (see Appendix D for a preliminary listing of indicators); technical and financial analysis; development of feature screen images, and the writing of this report.

“The HCN can present information in a way that engages people and can inspire them to informed action.”

*Regina Delahunt, Director
Whatcom County Health Department*

The report provides background on the HCF and the HCN and describes in detail the features and technology of the HCN. The report also outlines the responsibilities for both Whatcom Coalition stakeholders and Healthy Communities Foundation staff for implementing and maintaining the HCN system, and presents cost estimates and a timeline for implementing the first release of the HCN.

Organizations Attending March, 2004 Planning Workshops

Bellingham Herald	Hinet (Health Information Network)	United Way
Bellingham Public Library	HPN Employee Assistance Program	Unity Group
Bellingham Technical College	Lummi Indian Business Council	Western Washington University
City of Bellingham	North Sound Baykeeper	Whatcom County
Cornerstone Strategies	Northwest Ecosystem Alliance	Whatcom Council of Governments
DEA Incorporated	Northwest Regional Council	Whatcom County Health Department
Domestic Violence Commission	Opportunity Council	Whatcom County Medical Society
Early Childhood Opportunities NW	Port of Bellingham	Whatcom Community Foundation
Economic Development Council	St. Joseph Hospital/ PeaceHealth	Whatcom Educational Credit Union
Front Street Partnership	St. Luke's Foundation	Whatcom Volunteer Center

THE HEALTHY COMMUNITIES NETWORK

The Healthy Communities Foundation (HCF) is a non-profit organization that developed the HCN for use by local communities to improve quality of life and health. The system is designed to provide the general public and community leaders with tools and information that facilitates awareness of community issues *and* promotes individual and collective action. The system is expected to be widely adopted by communities around the United States.

The Healthy Communities Network (HCN) can be thought of as an internet-based clearinghouse with three primary objectives: provide community health information, facilitate communication, and support personal and community decision-making. Therefore the system has three key components, with many supporting features:

1. A dashboard, or graphical view, of the indicators of the quality of life and health in a community (this draws attention to problem areas and successes)
2. A best and promising practices database in relevant fields that work to promote health and advance quality of life and health (this allows users to see efforts in other areas that might be useful in their own community)
3. A set of applications that promote “taking action,” such as generating surveys, tracking a variety of information, and listing local resources and contacts (these applications allow communities to organize and effect thoughtful change)

Via these three key components, the HCN provides community leaders and the general public with the ability to: (1) become aware of and track quality of life and health indicators; (2) access databases of successful practices and information targeted towards improving quality of life at a local level; and (3) facilitate the communication needed to effect change.

Nationally Centralized, Locally Customized

The HCN system architecture is scalable to support thousands of communities and millions of users, yet is easily customized to the specific needs of a community. The system is provided as an Application Service Provider (ASP) service so that implementation for a local community is greatly simplified. Specifically, the HCF has aggregated national and state content, and operates the computer servers and provides maintenance services. This allows local communities to focus on local partnerships and content without expending resources collecting national and state data and addressing technology issues such as servers, backup systems, and bandwidth capacity.

“I am very enthused and interested – I would like the opportunity to work on the project.”

*Jim Darling, Executive Director
Port of Bellingham*

“This site allows people to follow their interests. It gives equal access to information for all, and everyone who wants to can easily find out what's going on in our community.”

*Don Keenan, Deputy Administrator
City of Bellingham*

SYSTEM FEATURES

The HCN system offers the following features, each of which can be customized by a local community:

- Homepage contains news, quality of life and health indicators, featured content and a variety of other components designed to attract users and encourage frequent site visits.
- Dashboard Indicators are color-coded with links to national, state and local databases to allow citizens to quickly understand the status of quality of life and health in their community.
- Local Resources database allows users to find and contact local organizations.
- Promising Practices database allows users to find anything from a story to a comprehensive intervention that has already been tried.
- Community Health Scorecard and Citizenship Profile allows users to understand how their community compares to others and in what areas their community, and their own participation through lifestyle choices, could improve.
- News feeds, news alerts, and newsletters provide local, state and national news relevant to health and quality of life.
- Event Calendar highlights local events that are relevant to quality of life and health.
- Community Surveys to “poll” users on issues in the community or about the site itself
- Communication tools include online discussion groups and a contact database for users to find and contact individuals who are either experts in a particular area or have expressed interest in a particular field.



System Maintenance

The HCN includes a complete Administrative System for local representatives to input, control display, and maintain local data, news, and other information.

COST AND DEVELOPMENT STEPS

The system software and content will be licensed to a community for \$30,000 per year, with a one-time implementation and customization fee, which is estimated to not exceed \$50,000. The timeline to rollout the system for Whatcom County is approximately 5 months from project start to beta launch of the system.

In consultation with the WCHC leadership, HCF is recommending the following development steps, some of which would happen concurrently:

- Consensus building
- Governance and operational planning
- Marketing plan development
- Technical specification
- Implementation and testing
- Evaluation

“This web site holds a unique opportunity to show how well we work together...”

*Rob Pochert, President
Economic Development Council*

CONCLUSION

The HCF seeks a small number of innovative communities with which to pilot the HCN system. WCHC, having already established a coalition to work on community health issues, along with their experience in making community health indicators available in Whatcom County, is an ideal collaboration partner for HCF.

“To make decisions organizations need timely information that moves people to take action. In short, we need to inspire people. The same is true at the community level. The HCN can help us make informed decisions together, as a community”

*Nancy Bitting, CEO
St. Joseph Hospital*

“The HCN goes beyond benchmarking and gets information out to the community. I hope this can be brought before the city council; it could be a great help.”

*Terry Bornemann, 5th Ward
Bellingham City Council*

“A community that does a critical self- examination is ahead of the game when trying to improve quality of life.”

*Jim Miller, Executive Director
Whatcom Council of Governments*

“I hope this project becomes a reality for Whatcom County.”

*Wayne Langei, CEO
Whatcom Educational Credit Union*