Minority Leadership Program
October 2019

Purpose:

Persons of color working in health departments and other government agencies face myriad challenges as it pertains to job advancement, leadership development, and growth opportunities in these institutions. NASTAD recognizes the need to increase the capacity of emerging leaders in health departments and seeks to equip them with skills, mentors, and introspection to help them advance in their varied personal career trajectories. NASTAD's Minority Leadership Program (MLP) serves as a space rooted in social justice for health department staff of color to engage in critical conversations about job advancement, institutional barriers, managing emotions and burnout, racial- and gender-based microaggressions, triggers, staff and project management, communication and more. MLP is specifically designed to increase partnerships among staff of color working in state or CDC-funded health department HIV and hepatitis programs. Additionally, participants build meaningful professional relationships with members of previous cohorts, forming a national presence of active, professionals of color working towards equitable public health practice. Furthermore, cohorts help further the mission of NASTAD’s 2018 “Chair’s Challenge” to eliminate stigma by telling their stories about the fears, challenges, successes, and growth experienced as persons of color working in health departments, at times under very difficult and challenging political and organizational constraints. Participants delve into the vulnerability and trauma that arises when representing marginalized communities impacted by health inequities, while simultaneously doing the work to remediate disparities.

Outcome:

MLP participants hone and develop both hard and soft skills that assist them as they matriculate through their careers in public health. Participants complete two weeks of in-person trainings and are paired with peers in their cohort and with professional coaches for support, accountability and practice in between training dates. Additionally, participants build meaningful professional relationships with members of previous cohorts, forming a national presence of active, professionals of color working towards equitable public health practice. Furthermore, cohorts help further the mission of NASTAD’s 2018 “Chair’s Challenge” to eliminate stigma by telling their stories about the fears, challenges, successes, and growth experienced as persons of color working in health departments, at times under very difficult and challenging political and organizational constraints. Participants delve into the vulnerability and trauma that arises when representing marginalized communities impacted by health inequities, while simultaneously doing the work to remediate disparities.

“Transformative is the only word that comes to mind when I describe my experience with MLP. The impact of the time spent in session and in conversation with my fellow members has both lit a fire in my belly and brought a peace to myself that I was beginning to believe was unattainable. MLP was a place to learn, to gain a family and, in the process, to regain myself.”

– Kirsten Durzy,
Program Evaluator
Process:

Over the course of 10 months, MLP participants have two weeklong face-to-face meetings at the start and end of the program. Prior to attending, participants will complete a 360-assessment that will identify personal and professional gaps, strengths, areas for change, and readiness to take risks. The 360-assessment also incorporates feedback from a variety of colleagues and peers to provide participants with a comprehensive perspective on how they see themselves and how others perceive them.

In the first weeklong training, participants will be introduced to key foundational concepts rooted in a social justice-oriented framework that will help them begin to uncover more about themselves as leaders, advocates, and public health experts. Facilitators will guide participants on an interactive and personal journey that will require them to identify and address triggers, be ready and willing to take risks, give and receive feedback, and be open to experiential learning.

Recognizing that we stand on the shoulders of giants, the second weeklong training and final face-to-face convening will help participants channel the ancestral resilience and motivation that helps guide their passions for social change. Participants will further develop core skills and values pushing them further into thinking about their own evolution as leaders. MLP participants will practice identifying their vision for leadership and sharing it with their cohort for feedback and recognition. Participants will also develop planning tools and sustainability goals to keep the momentum and partnerships going when they return to their respective health departments.

When MLP participants are not engaged in face-to-face meetings, they will conduct accountability check-ins with peers and attend individualized coaching sessions aimed at increasing their capacity to work more effectively in health departments and further expand on skills learned during trainings. Additionally, MLP cohorts from across cycles will have opportunities to meaningfully engage, mentor, learn from and share resources with each other, creating a coordinated, national network of public health professionals of color striving for health equity and an end to HIV and viral hepatitis.

"At a time in my life when I was in need of clarity and support, I was offered the opportunity to become a part of a phenomenal group that has since changed my life. Every day, I have a force behind me of committed individuals fighting the good fight, who care about me, who are always there and who want better for me. They’re mi gente (my people)."

– Cristabel Rojo,
Language Services and Community Partnerships Coordinator