Linking CORE Leaders
COVID OPIOID RURAL EDUCATION

Program Outline and Natural Community Leader Expectations

Program Description

The goal of *Linking C.O.R.E. Leaders* is to lessen the long-term harms associated with the overlapping epidemics of opioid misuse/abuse and COVID-19 in rural communities of Nevada, Arizona and New Mexico. The Nevada Public Health Training Center, with support from geographically representative community members, has created a 12-week distance-learning program, targeted at Natural Community Leaders (NCLs), that aligns with the resources, values, and social factors of rural communities. Upon completion of the program, NCLs will have the opportunity to work closely with the Nevada Public Health Training Center and community partners to create unique, individualized dissemination plans to ensure that their communities positively benefit from *Linking C.O.R.E. Leaders.*

What is a Natural Community Leader?

Natural community leaders (NCLs) will be instrumental in the success of this project, serving as both recipients and disseminators of education vital to the health of their communities. NCLs are defined as any member of a community who has formal and/or informal influence on other community members due to their community involvement and social networks. Examples of Natural Community Leaders include community health workers, high school counselors, students, faith-based leaders, first responders, and/or small business owners, however, **anyone can be a Natural Community Leader!** The only requirements are familiarity with community needs/priorities and dedication to engaging in community-level work that is sure to create long-term positive influence.

Participants should be geographically-representative of USDA-classified rural counties of Nevada, Arizona and New Mexico*. Participants will commit to participating in a 12-week online course intended to educate on prevention of opioid misuse/abuse and COVID-19. Upon completing the program, with guidance from the Nevada Public Health Training Center and community partners, NCLs will carry out uniquely developed dissemination plans. This program is open to community members with or without prior knowledge and/or experience. Participants will gain valuable professional and social skills that are sure to help them stand out among their peers as Natural Community Leaders. Participants may also be eligible for continuing education, volunteer hours, and/or other incentives.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) uses a classification scheme (Rural-Urban Continuum Codes) that distinguishes metropolitan counties by the population size of their metro area, and nonmetropolitan counties by degree of urbanization and adjacency to a metro area. Eligible counties are listed.

Arizona	Nevada		New Mexico		
Apache	Churchill	Mineral	Catron	Harding	Quay
Gila	Douglas	Nye	Chaves	Hidalgo	Rio Arriba
Graham	Elko	Pershing	Cibola	Lea	Roosevelt
Greenlee	Esmeralda	White	Colfax	Lincoln	San Miguel
La Paz	Eureka	Pine	Curry	Los Alamos	Sierra
Navajo	Humboldt		De Baca	Luna	Socorro
Santa Cruz	Lander		Eddy	McKinley	Taos
	Lincoln		Grant	Mora	Union
	Lyon		Guadalupe	Otero	

Program Expectations

In signing up to participate in *Linking CORE Leaders,* responsibilities include:

1. **Participation in 12-week distance-learning course.** NCLs will participate in an interactive, 12-week online course, delivered both synchronously and asynchronously, for approximately 1-1.5 hours per week. The program will highlight the influences of intersecting public health emergencies on communities, with a special emphasis on health equity and the unique challenges faced by marginalized populations, in this case, those living in rural counties of AZ, NM, and NV. A schedule of the 12-week program is listed in the following pages.

2. **Developing dissemination plans and commitment to community education.** Following completion of the course, NCLs will participate in a guided process to develop a dissemination plan that is unique to their individual communities. The dissemination plan and implementation will be carried out with technical assistance provided by NVPHTC and local community-based organizations; programming may include (but is not limited to) peer support groups, youth education, community toolboxes, faith-based prevention services, community take-back events, community health challenges, and social media or print campaigns. Formal dissemination will take place in the 6 months following completion of the 12-week program.

3. **Maintaining contact with NVPHTC for at least 6 months following program completion.** This 6-month period will consist of educating the community and preparing various types of programming based on material covered in the course, with oversight and assistance provided by NVPHTC and community partners. Dissemination plans and contact will be unique to each individual participant and community.

4. **Participation in evaluation.** Evaluation will be conducted at the beginning and end of the course, and at 3- and 6- month points of dissemination. NCLs input and feedback will be requested throughout the evaluation period; they should be prepared to regularly report on dissemination progress after completing the 12-week course. Upon completion of entire 9-month program (June 2021-March 2022), NCLs will be presented with certificates and continuing education, if applicable.

Linking CORE Leaders Program Outline

	Topic	Delivery	Time Commitment	Learning Objectives
Week 1 June 21	Welcome & Intro to Health Equity	Synchronous	90 minutes	1. Develop a foundational understanding of the Social Determinants of Health and how they influence health inequities. 2. Understand the rationale behind the "Natural Community Leader" approach and how it can create a chain of positive influence within the community.
Week 2 July 28	Substance Use Disorder and Preventive Efforts	Asynchronous	60 minutes	1. Define Substance Use Disorder (SUD) and identify community risk factors. 2. Evaluate individual community efforts in the realm of SUD prevention and make suggestions for bridging any existing gaps in services.
Week 3 July 5	Harm Reduction and Supporting Recovery	Asynchronous	60 minutes	1. Identify the principles of "harm reduction" and how they can be applied in community-level work. 2. Understand the Continuum of Care and how Harm Reduction fits into each aspect of the continuum. 3. Be able to educate on Harm Reduction practices associated with use and social practices. 4. Understand day-to-day challenges associated with recovery and learn strategies to support people in recovery.
Week 4 July 12	Navigating Stigma & Cultural Competence	Synchronous	90 minutes	1. Define "cultural competence" and recognize its value in advancing health equity. 2. Understand the continuum of "cultural competence" and identify strategies to incorporate it in day-to-day work. 3. Identify the influences that stigma has on health inequities and how it can create barriers to positive change. 4. Learn best practices for cultural inclusivity in community-level work.

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Week 5 July 19	An Opioid Crisis in the Midst of a Pandemic	Synchronous	90 minutes	1. Understand the impact of emerging public health emergencies on existing wicked problems within a community. 2. Analyze the state of opioid misuse/abuse in the context of COVID-19 relative to each individual community. 3. Understand the ways in which rural communities are disproportionately affected by crisis.
Week 6 July 26	Review of Stigma - Medical Mistrust and Misinformation	Synchronous	90 minutes	1. Review the impacts of stigma on behavior and adherence to public health recommendations. 2. Understand the history of medical mistrust and how it is manifested in marginalized communities. 3. Apply strategies to respond to misinformation, specifically regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccine hesitancy.
Week 7 August 2	Impact on Mental Health pt. 1	Asynchronous	60 minutes	1. Understand the stigma surrounding mental health, and the impact that this stigma has on help-seeking behavior. 2. Receive an introduction into the myths and realities of mental illness. 3. Describe the impact that opioid misuse/abuse has on mental health and how the challenges with both may intersect.
Week 8 August 9	Impact on Mental Health pt. 2	Asynchronous	60 minutes	1. Evaluate perceived existing mental health challenges in individual communities. 2. Understand how these existing mental health challenges may be impacted by public health emergencies. 3. Learn strategies for supporting community members' mental health, considering the influence of stigma on help-seeking behavior.

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	Topic	Delivery	Time Commitment	Learning Objectives
Week 9 August 16	Action Planning in Response to Community Crisis	Synchronous	90 minutes	1. Evaluate community priorities and key stakeholders in times of community crisis and emergency. 2. Develop an action plan that is responsive to identified community needs. 3. Demonstrate ability to modify an action plan in the event of significant challenges and/or barriers.
Week 10 August 23	Community Organizing and Mobilization	Asynchronous	60 minutes	1. Explain the spectrum of community organizing and its ability to advance health equity. 2. Apply strategies and tools for developing, strengthening, and maintaining community partnerships. 3. Describe why policy change is essential for advancing health equity.
Week 11 August 30	Planning for Sustainability and Continuing the Conversation	Asynchronous	60 minutes	1. Understand and apply strategies for long-term program sustainability. 2. Demonstrate ability to modify programming based on community need, target audience, and shared values. 3. Argue the need for responsive programming coupled with policy change to effectively advance health equity.
Week 12 September 6	Evaluating Success & Next Steps	Synchronous	90 minutes	1. Analyze informal evaluation measures for community programs. 2. Be able to identify benchmarks for success in community programming. 3. Evaluate existing community needs and begin to brainstorm directions for dissemination.