

APHEO Member Survey 2011

APHEO Strategic Goal #1

“Increase the capacity of APHEO to advance and promote epidemiology in the public health system”

One of the actions identified by the work group responsible for working on this strategic goal was to conduct a survey of APHEO Members in order to gain some insights into their engagement in the association; participation on work groups and planning committees; use of the list serve and website; recommendations for building capacity within the association; recommendations for engagement members in the association as well as any other insights that were willing to offer.

This survey was conducted on-line (Fluid Survey) between May 25 and June 3, 2011. All members were asked to participate. Eighty-eight (43%) of the 207 members responded representing all regions of Ontario. Half of the respondents were affiliate members. Fifteen percent of the respondents had joined APHEO prior to year 2000 and 57% joined in 2006 or later.

Member engagement in APHEO

- 43% of the members indicated that they did not attend a single general meeting in the past two years and 37% reported attending one meeting a year in this time frame
- 49% of the respondents indicated reading minutes of general meetings as a way of staying abreast APHEO business
- Only 15% indicated reading executive meeting minutes (this would include executive and past executive members)
- 51% of respondents indicated having been involved in APHEO project activities
- The Core Indicators Project had the most involvement by members
- Networking opportunities, training and education, ability to collaborate, access to resources, list serve, website and ability to identify and locate members and other contacts were noted as important to supporting individuals as APHEO members.
- The following barriers to participation in APHEO were listed: Time constraints (77%), lack of interest in the business portion of the association (45%) and geographic location (42%).
- The issue of APHEO’s focus (local public health epidemiology) as opposed to epidemiology in the broader public health context was raised. Broadening of the scope could potentially attract a more diverse group of individuals. This would be beneficial from many aspects: greater level of skills and knowledge, greater engagement by more members, greater pool of individuals to take on leadership roles in special projects and committees as well as volunteers for the Executive Committee.

Recommendations:

1. Find out from members what aspects of APHEO business they are interested in and how that information can be shared. Consider the following model:
 - a. One general meeting per year (AGM), held in conjunction with the workshop or conference, at which the business of APHEO is discussed, policies are reviewed and approved and any required voting takes place.
 - b. The remaining three general meetings will be replaced with educational sessions only, sharing of project/representative updates and an optional open Executive meeting which can be attended by all members. These open Executive meetings could serve as a mentoring/internship opportunities to those members who express interest in serving on the Executive in the near future.
2. Re-visit APHEO constitution and membership status at next round of Strategic Planning.

APHEO website and list serve

- 35% of the respondents indicated using the APHEO website weekly and another 31% indicated monthly
- Majority of the respondents (84%) indicated using the APHEO website to look at the core indicators. Another 69% indicated looking up conference/workshop updates and resources. More than half of the respondents also indicated using the membership list and job posting site.
- 52% of the respondents indicated reading all posts on a daily basis with focus to those that were directly related to their work
- 67% indicated posting queries several times a year or more and 75% indicated responding to queries several times month or more

The Website Work Group, established in 2011, is well on its way to addressing rejuvenation of the APHEO website and ensuring that these key areas are easily accessible.

Recommendations:

1. Add a Q&A section (perhaps under 'About APHEO' or 'Membership') that will address the benefits of APHEO membership to the individual, his/her agency, the public health epidemiology community and the province at-large. Same for benefits of being an Executive Member.
2. Add a section that clearly outlines current projects along with list of opportunities of how members can get involved.

APHEO Conferences and Workshops

- 78% of the respondents indicated having attended an APHEO conference/workshop since 2001.
- Only 18% attended 7 or more conferences/workshops in that 10-year period.
- The reasons listed for not being able to attend conferences/workshops were listed as follows: work-time constraints (46%), content not being applicable to area of work (38%), alternating attendance with colleagues from year to year (~32%), personal reasons (24%), not financially supported by own agency (22%) and attendance not supported by agency (16%).

APHEO workgroups, special projects, planning committees – leadership and membership

Leadership

- Only a quarter of the respondents indicated having chaired/led an APHEO workgroup, special project or a planning committee.
- The key incentives to taking on a leadership role on a project included: wanting to help APHEO (78%), the content being of interest (67%), desire/opportunity to network with colleagues (67%) and the content being directly relevant to area of work (61%). Financial compensation was indicated by less than 10% of the respondents.
- Typically, individuals were recruited for such leadership roles by another APHEO member approaching them, the call for volunteers via the list serve and an Executive member approaching them.
- The following things discouraged members from taking on a leadership role: work-time constraints (68%), lack of experience as chair/lead (47%), lack of knowledge/skills in content area (42%) among others. One criticism was that sufficient information about the project/topic/issue was not available or not shared at the outset. While this was not a major deterrent to participation, it does reflect a reality for APHEO. Namely, a number of opportunities and requests are brought forward to the Executive with little information available and very tight timelines. The Executive does the best they can to flesh out the information and key things for consideration to pass onto members. Secondly, the ability to chair a work group/special project/committee is not dependent on content knowledge. A different set of skills is required and this needs to be clearly communicated and emphasized with members in order to broaden the potential pool of volunteers.

Recommendations:

1. Develop a mentorship/internship strategy which will: a) keep track of individuals who are showing interest in leadership roles and b) allow these individuals to sit-in on meetings in order to learn about process, gain new skills and gain insights.
2. Re-visit the '*Project Manger Roles and Responsibilities*' procedures and elaborate on skills required (e.g., add something around content knowledge not required but good organizational skills etc as required).

Membership

- Just over half of the respondents indicated having been a member of an APHEO workgroup, special project or committee.
- The key incentives to becoming a member of a workgroup/special project/committee included: content being of interest to the individual (76%), content being directly relevant to one's area of work (73%), desire/opportunity to network with colleagues (61%) and content being of interest to one's health department (54%). Nearly half of the respondents also indicated that such an opportunity would provide them with some desired/needed experience.
- The following were identified as the main barriers to becoming a member of a work group/special project/planning committee: work-time constraints (64%) and lack of knowledge/skills in content area (40%). More than a quarter of the respondents also indicated that 'such work is too time consuming for me' and 'I've never been part of a work group/special project/committee'.

Recommendations:

1. Develop a mentorship/internship strategy which will: a) keep track of individuals who are showing interest in APHEO projects and the business of APHEO and b) allow these individuals to sit-in on meetings in order to learn about process, gain new skills and insights.
2. Re-visit the *Recruitment, Roles and Responsibilities of Work Group Members* procedures and elaborate on skills required (e.g., add something around content expert knowledge is not required but willingness to learn and contribute is).

Satisfaction

- While 71% of the respondents indicated being satisfied-to-very satisfied with the experience of working on an APHEO workgroup/special project/committee, more than a quarter felt neutral. The reasons for this ambiguity should be explored as part of an exit-interview/lessons-learned exercise.
- Mostly recognition and appreciation came from peer work group members and not so much from the Executive, APHEO members, employers or colleagues.

Recommendations:

1. Develop a standard recognition/appreciation process and annual event to acknowledge the participation of all work group/special project/committee chairs and members (e.g., a recognition event at the annual general meeting during a conference/workshop).
2. Draft a template for an acknowledgment/thank-you letter to be shared with each member's employer to acknowledge participation on a particular project (verify that this will not cause any conflict for the member).
3. Include list of all work groups/special projects and committees along with full participant list in each Annual APHEO Report.

Health unit in-kind contributions

- 65% of the respondents indicated that they required permission from their superior to be a part of an APHEO work group/special project
- 50% indicated that their participation was considered as work time and 43% stated that it was a combination of work and volunteer time
- 76% of the respondents indicated that their health unit provided in-kind support. Majority of this support was in the way of work-hours and the use of office (e.g., emails, phone, photocopier, fax) and office supplies to conduct APHEO business. In rare cases, administrative staff helped with various specific time-limited tasks.

Engaging new members in APHEO business and projects

Members were asked to provide suggestions on how to engage new members in APHEO business and projects. Suggestions were grouped according to theme in order to arrive at some recommendations.

Recommendations:

1. Establish an orientation and mentorship initiative for new members. This had been identified as one of the work plan items during the 2008 Strategic Planning session.
2. Build awareness about APHEO amongst current epidemiology and public health students (also identified in the strategic plan).
3. Build awareness of contributions of APHEO to public health epidemiology and provincial initiatives amongst employers.
4. Establish a page on the APHEO website that lists and summarizes all work groups, special projects and committees providing enough detail to let members know how they can get involved.
5. Establish a formal appreciation/recognition and thank-you process for the member and her/his employer.
6. Use the new function of the membership list – ‘special interests and experience’ – to seek out volunteers for particular projects directly.
7. Set aside a formal moment at the annual general meeting (i.e., held in-person during a conference/workshop) to list and welcome all new members who joined APHEO since the last AGM.

Supporting APHEO members already active in APHEO business and projects

Members were asked to provide suggestions on how to support those members who are already participating in APHEO business and projects. Suggestions were grouped according to theme in order to arrive at some recommendations.

Recommendations:

1. Establish a formal appreciation/recognition and thank-you process for the member and her/his employer.
2. Ensure that all APHEO-related expenses are covered and projects have everything in place that is required (e.g., meeting space, T/C lines). Consider financial support for members (e.g., travel coverage) when their in-person meeting is critical to the success of the project. Consider lowered registration fees for those planning the conference or workshop.
3. Executive to work with the group to ensure that terms of reference are clear, that individual responsibilities are outlined and that a reasonable work plan and timeline are set. Establish a formal check-in process with each project manager and chair to ensure that each work group is supported and functioning effectively.

What recommendations would you make to APHEO to build capacity within the association?

Building capacity within the organization was identified as one of the key strategic directions. Members were provided with an opportunity to put forward their thoughts and recommendations related to this issue. The input gained from this survey is summarized in a theme-format in the recommendations listed below.

Recommendations:

1. Market the benefits of APHEO and APHEO membership to all public health units and Medical Officers of Health (MOH). Get MOH's buy-in and approval for members to protect some of their work time for APHEO projects.
2. Provide more educational sessions throughout the year.
3. Meet new members; help them network; find out their expertise and interests and connect them with relevant APHEO projects and committees.
4. Use APHEO funds to hire someone to fill in the gaps in some activities on as-needed basis.
5. Encourage collaboration between PHUs; between PHU staff and PHO staff, between PHU staff and affiliate members.
6. Recognize efforts of all individuals involved.
7. Develop a train-the-trainer concept (i.e., sponsor a member to attend a training session and then conduct an educational session or workshop to transfer knowledge).
8. Establish a page on APHEO website for sharing reports, knowledge transfer, evaluations etc.
9. Share tools and resources to meet the foundational standard – working with multidisciplinary program areas to meet their data needs etc.
10. Engage external expertise in APHEO projects to enhance knowledge exchange, collaboration and networking.
11. Market APHEO to students in all relevant programs.

Some employers are very supportive of their APHEO members. Do you have any recommendations for how APHEO can encourage other employers to be supportive of their employees participating/undertaking APHEO activities?

We know that members have varying levels of opportunity in APHEO engagement due to varying levels of support from their employers. Some members work in agencies that support their membership in APHEO; their involvement in APHEO projects and their participation on the APHEO Executive. In some cases, unfortunately, members are not as well supported and that precludes their engagement in the association since majority of the APHEO business is conducted during work hours.

Responses to this question are presented in theme format in the recommendations listed below.

Recommendations:

1. Communicate to employers the benefits of APHEO membership and the benefits of participation in APHEO to their staff; their health unit and the practice of public health epidemiology (e.g., skill and knowledge building for the individual; networking opportunities and professional support for the individual; capacity building within the agency; knowledge exchange; increased awareness of issues of public health concern; collaboration with external stakeholders; etc.).
2. Recognition letters, to employers, for each member involved in a special project/work group/committee (i.e., outline individual's accomplishment or express gratitude for participation).
3. Encourage members who are in the management positions to support their staff's involvement in APHEO and APHEO business.
4. Explore how ALPHA, COMOH and OPHA can assist with this (e.g., how do these associations build relationships with the employers of their members and/or their staff).

Appendix A: List of recommendations.

The importance of APHEO:

1. Add a Q&A section (perhaps under 'About APHEO' or 'Membership') that will address the benefits of APHEO membership to the individual, his/her agency, the public health epidemiology community and the province at-large. Same for benefits of being an Executive Member.
2. Add a "Current Projects" section under 'Projects' (on the website) that clearly outlines current projects along with list of opportunities of how members can get involved.
3. Build awareness about APHEO amongst current epidemiology and public health students (also identified in the strategic plan).
4. Build awareness of contributions of APHEO to public health epidemiology and provincial initiatives amongst employers.
5. Establish a page on the APHEO website that lists and summarizes all work groups, special projects and committees providing enough detail to let members know how they can get involved.
6. Market the benefits of APHEO and APHEO membership to all public health units and Medical Officers of Health (MOH). Get MOH's buy-in and approval for members to protect some of their work time for APHEO projects.
7. Market APHEO to students in all relevant programs.
8. Communicate to employers the benefits of APHEO membership and the benefits of participation in APHEO to their staff; their health unit and the practice of public health epidemiology (e.g., skill and knowledge building for the individual; networking opportunities and professional support for the individual; capacity building within the agency; knowledge exchange; increased awareness of issues of public health concern; collaboration with external stakeholders; etc.).
9. Encourage members who are in the management positions to support their staff's involvement in APHEO and APHEO business.

Work with Members:

10. Find out from members what aspects of APHEO business they are interested in and how that information can be shared. Consider the following model:
 - a. One general meeting per year (AGM) held in conjunction with the workshop or conference, at which the business of APHEO is discussed, policies are reviewed and approved and any required voting takes place.
 - b. The remaining three general meetings will be replaced with educational sessions only, sharing of project/representative updates and an optional open Executive meeting which can be attended by all members. These open Executive meetings could serve as a mentoring/internship opportunities to those members who express interest in serving on the Executive in the near future.
11. Develop a mentorship/internship strategy which will: a) keep track of individuals who are showing interest in leadership roles and b) allow these individuals to sit-in on meetings in order to learn about process, gain new skills and gain insights.
12. Establish an orientation and mentorship initiative for new members. This had been identified as one of the work plan items during the 2008 Strategic Planning session.

13. Use the new function of the membership list – ‘special interests and experience’ – to seek out volunteers for particular projects directly.
14. Set aside a formal moment at the annual general meeting (i.e., held in-person during a conference/workshop) to list and welcome all new members who joined APHEO since the last AGM.
15. Meet new members; help them network; find out their expertise and interests and connect them with relevant APHEO projects and committees.
16. Engage external expertise in APHEO projects to enhance knowledge exchange, collaboration and networking. Members should be part of collaboration with the Executive and make recommendations on external resources and experts.
17. Develop a train-the-trainer concept (i.e., sponsor a member to attend a training session and then conduct an educational session or workshop to transfer knowledge).
18. Establish a page on APHEO website for sharing reports, knowledge transfer, evaluations etc.
19. Share tools and resources to meet the foundational standard – working with multidisciplinary program areas to meet their data needs etc.

Recognition of Members:

20. Develop a standard recognition/appreciation process and annual event to acknowledge the participation of all work group/special project/committee chairs and members (e.g., a recognition event at the annual general meeting during a conference/workshop).
21. Draft a template for an acknowledgment/thank-you letter to be shared with each member’s employer to acknowledge participation on a particular project (verify that this will not cause any conflict for the member).
22. Include list of all work groups/special projects and committees along with full participant list in each Annual APHEO Report.
23. Establish a formal appreciation/recognition and thank-you process for the member and her/his employer.
24. Recognize efforts of all individuals involved.
25. Recognition letters, to employers, for each member involved in a special project/work group/committee (i.e., outline individual’s accomplishment or express gratitude for participation).

Executive to:

26. Re-visit APHEO constitution and membership status at next round of Strategic Planning.
27. Ensure that all APHEO-related expenses are covered and projects have everything in place that is required (e.g., meeting space, T/C lines). Consider financial support for members (e.g., travel coverage) when their in-person meeting is critical to the success of the project. Consider lowered registration fees for those planning the conference or workshop.
28. Executive to work with the group to ensure that terms of reference are clear, that individual responsibilities are outlined and that a reasonable work plan and timeline are set. Establish a formal check-in process with each project manager and chair to ensure that each work group is supported and functioning effectively.
29. Provide more educational sessions throughout the year.
30. Use APHEO funds to hire someone to fill in the gaps in some activities on as-needed basis.
31. Encourage collaboration between PHUs; between PHU staff and PHO staff, between PHU staff and affiliate members.
32. Engage external expertise in APHEO projects to enhance knowledge exchange, collaboration and networking.
33. Explore how ALPHA, COMOH and OPHA can assist with this (e.g., how do these associations build relationships with the employers of their members and/or their staff).
34. Re-visit the '*Project Manger Roles and Responsibilities*' procedures and elaborate on skills required (e.g., add something around content knowledge not required but good organizational skills etc as required).
35. Re-visit the *Recruitment, Roles and Responsibilities of Work Group Members* procedures and elaborate on skills required (e.g., add something around content expert knowledge is not required but willingness to learn and contribute is).