

Jumpstart your Success as a State Health Official

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First:

- ✓ **Remember this is a temporary job and ends.** It will be exciting, rewarding, and challenging.
- ✓ **Pick two things you want to accomplish during your tenure.** You will be driven by everyone else's agendas from day one, particularly the governor's. Carve out some protected time to accomplish your own priorities.
- ✓ **Understand your authority.** Review your state's health laws and regulations.
- ✓ **Review your state's ethics policies on conflicts of interest.** Make sure your team reads them, understands them, and complies with them. Disclose any potential conflicts of interest in appropriate forms early.

Prepare:

- ✓ **Expect to have a public health crisis to address very early in your tenure.**

Always:

- 👍 **Always inform the governor's office about emerging problems.** A "heads-up" will help you keep your head! Brief her team early and often.
- 👍 **Always thank legislators** for their public service, whether or not you agree with their stance.
- 👍 **Always take the art of the long view.** Focus on what can be achieved over time. Keep today's mishaps or opportunities in perspective.
- 👍 With employees, stakeholders, and media, **always be honest, timely in your response, respectful, and forthcoming.**

Never:

- 👎 **Never upstage your governor.** Even if he or she asks you to speak or recognizes your work, keep the focus on their leadership.
- 👎 **Never surprise your governor.** Overcommunicate about any issue that might be controversial, impact legislators, get media attention, or have a potential impact on the public.
- 👎 **Never take gifts or meals.** If you just say no, you will decrease paperwork, eliminate concerns about conflicts of interest, and make your life easier.
- 👎 **Never write anything in email, text, or social media that you wouldn't want to see on the front page of the newspaper.** Explain this to your family too, and discuss their use of social media.
- 👎 **Don't immediately say no to requests or ideas** from colleagues, legislators, and constituents, unless they are illegal or unethical. Keep an open mind. Offer to look into the request or idea, get the person's contact information, and either personally get back to them or have someone do it on your behalf.

Getting Up To Speed

Learn about state government operations:

-  Governor/ Cabinet/General Assembly/legislature/agencies—Learn roles, agendas, and influences.
-  Laws/regulations/voting process/veto power—Know the process.
-  Yearly schedule and flow of activities, including your agency's budget process
-  Recent history—What are recent agency key losses and gains?

Sources: *state government website, agency website, recent news coverage, and university professors of government*

Review your state's public health metrics, rankings, and issues for your state.

Sources: *Trust for America's Health, CDC metrics, County Health Rankings, and ASTHO profile of state health agencies.*

Read the CDC's Public Health Emergency Response Guide

<https://emergency.cdc.gov/planning/pdf/cdcreponseguide.pdf>

Get to know your agency (website, annual report, budget, and media coverage)

-  Review recent news coverage about the agency and the outgoing SHO.
-  Learn the media landscape: Which reporters or outlets seem to have been fair and supportive in their coverage? Are there reporters or outlets who have been particularly critical?

Know your state's officials:

-  Governor's office staff—Get key phone numbers.
-  Legislative leaders—Set up meetings with key health committee leaders.
-  Your own elected officials—You are a constituent!

Communications

Discuss expectations for staff communications, development, and training with your HR lead and senior staff.

-  How often will you have all staff meetings?
-  How will you communicate with off-site staff?
-  How will you inspire, engage, and mentor your staff?
-  How will you develop your future workforce?
-  What are immediate staffing needs, priority positions to fill, and internal candidates?
-  Understand what outside correspondence is currently being sent under your signature and work with your team to decide what you want to review and approve, and when.

Establish routine communications with governor and secretary. One approach is to use an SBAR (situation/background/analysis/recommendation). Work to gain confidence and familiarity with your communication style, which will become even more important during crises.

Set communications procedures. Determine how you will communicate. What are the state's policies for personal phone, email, and social media use? Who's responsible for your agency's official social media account, and what role do you want to play? Talk to your family about their use of email and social media.

Meet with your communications lead. Understand how your communications team works. How do they coordinate with the governor's team? Identify reporters who you should meet with and develop positive relationships with. What are emerging stories and issues?

Key Meetings

Your Assistant/Executive Coordinator

- 🗨️ Explain how you want meetings scheduled – how long and what time of day.
- 🗨️ Discuss your expectations for breaks, lunch, phone calls, and prioritization. Do you want your assistant to have access to your email and/or calendar? Should he or she interrupt you if family members call?
- 🗨️ How do you want your assistant to communicate with you about urgent issues (phone, text, email, and/or calendar)?

Your Senior Leadership Team

- 🗨️ Consider an ice-breaking exercise, and explain your leadership style and your expectations. Invite them to give presentations on their programs, staff, and budget.
- 🗨️ Ask them about key issues that might “blow up” in the coming months.

Governor’s Chief of Staff, Policy Team, and Legislative Lead

- 🗨️ Develop trust early on.

State Emergency Management Coordinator

- 🗨️ Understand how and when you will be contacted, know your responsibilities, and begin to learn about incident command, emergency operations center, and public health emergencies.

Legal Counsel

- 🗨️ Understand your legal responsibilities and public health emergency laws, regulations, and roles.
- 🗨️ Understand the scope and responsibilities of the Attorney General and general counsel in representing you for decisions made in your role.

Other Agency Heads

- 🗨️ Quickly get to know your fellow agency heads within the Cabinet.

Key Legislators

- 🗨️ Health committees
- 🗨️ Budget committees
- 🗨️ Majority and minority leadership
- 🗨️ Legislative staff

Local Health Directors

- 🗨️ Meet key local health directors in large and small jurisdictions, including Tribal leaders.
- 🗨️ Go to them, tour their facilities, and understand their issues.

Medical Society, Hospital Executives, and Health Plan Leaders

Board of Health Members



This document is based on the collective insights of 54 current and former state health officials who provided both in person and online advice and insight to Dr. Karen Remley, a senior fellow at the de Beaumont Foundation who served as the state health official of Virginia.

ABOUT THE DE BEAUMONT FOUNDATION

The de Beaumont Foundation creates and invests in bold solutions to build healthier communities. The Foundation advances policies that improve community health, builds partnerships, and strengthens public health to create communities where people can achieve their best possible health. Learn more at www.deBeaumont.org.