

Leadership program prepares professionals to respond to public health crises in Puerto Rico

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A program called "Advancing Leadership in Times of Crisis" (ALTC) has helped to increase leadership skills and knowledge among public

health professionals in Puerto Rico—preparing them to adapt and respond to the challenges posed by a series of public health emergencies, reports a study in a supplement to the September/October issue of the *Journal of Public Health Management and Practice*.

"[The] ALTC program has been effective in increasing knowledge and understanding of [leadership](#) concepts in times of crisis," according to the report by Raisa Ugarte, MA, of Impactivo, LLC, a [health](#) consulting firm in San Juan, PR. The special issue of *JPHMP* highlights the activities and innovations promoted by the Health Resources & Services Administration's Regional Public Health Training Centers (PHTCs).

PHTCs aim to 'evolve and adapt' to the needs of the public health workforce

In 2015, Impactivo developed the ALTC program for the Region 2 Public Health Training Center, under a sub-award from HRSA. The program was originally designed to provide public health leaders with skills to meet challenges posed by a fiscal crisis in Puerto Rico.

In subsequent years, ALTC evolved and changed in response to a series of public health emergencies, including the Zika epidemic in 2016 and Hurricanes Irma and María in 2018 and 2019. In response to COVID-19, the program pivoted to a fully virtual, interactive learning format in 2020.

Built on key concepts of adaptive leadership and community organization, the Spanish-language ALTC program was designed to provide "the opportunity of deep exploration in current leadership challenges and practical experience to enhance their effectiveness," Ms. Ugarte and coauthors write. The curriculum consisted of contextualized lectures presented by subject matter experts, reflexive and networking

activities, and group projects to practice [leadership skills](#). The program content focused on provision of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Essential Public Health Services, with an emphasis on health equity.

From 2016 to 2019, the ALTC program was delivered to a total of 82 public health professionals in four cohorts. Eighty percent of participants were women and 100% were Hispanic, "empowering underrepresented groups to achieve change." The analysis included responses to a total of 343 evaluation surveys completed by participants.

The results showed "extremely high levels of satisfaction and benefits" with the leadership training provided by the ATLC program. Participants gave high ratings for increased knowledge and understanding of subject matter, applicability of the concepts, clarity of the presentation, and overall satisfaction. Participants in the virtual version of ATLC in 2021 provided similarly high scores in their evaluations.

"Among the strengths of the program, participants reported that the diversity of subject matter experts reflected communities they served and the opportunity of growing their professional connections with renowned public health leaders," the researchers write. In a follow-up survey, 89% of participants reported that they were still working in the public health field and that the ALTC content was relevant to their current role. That's a notable outcome for workforce retention and development in public health—a field with an "aging and shrinking workforce."

More information: Sophia Russell et al, HRSA's Investment in Public Health Training Centers, *Journal of Public Health Management and Practice* (2022). [DOI: 10.1097/PHH.0000000000001489](https://doi.org/10.1097/PHH.0000000000001489)

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