

## The 2019 Innovation in Governance Awards Program

### Contact Information:

**Municipality:** Township of Weehawken

**Population:** 14,864

**County:** Hudson

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### Project Information

**Initiative Title:** North Hudson Partnership

**Description:** Innovative collaborative platform w/ potential to inform how best to organize for community health and wellness, improving outcomes and preventing health disparities

The judges will be looking for successful innovative efforts by a municipality or a partnership among several municipalities or a municipal/county joint effort. Innovations must have been initiated or completed during the time period June 1, 2018 - September 30, 2019

**Project Specific Details:** *(Please explain your innovation and include up to 3 supplemental pages if needed.)*

- How has this initiative successfully met the local needs of your municipality?
- How have the stakeholders benefited & responded to this initiative?
- Are there any measured savings or program improvements?
- Please include whether the innovation is temporary or permanent
- How can this innovation be replicated in other communities across the state?

***Please attach a supplemental sheet(s) noting the details of your initiative.***  
*(Supplemental attachments NOT to exceed 3 pages)*

***Application Deadline:*** *Applications must be received no later than Monday, October 1, 2019. Mail applications to NJLM Innovation in Governance, 222 West State St., Trenton, NJ 08608, Attention: Ciara Bradley or send by email to CBradley@njlm.org*

*If you have any questions, please contact Ciara Bradley at the League of Municipalities  
609-695-3481 ext. 128 or CBradley@njlm.org*

## **“The North Hudson Partnership” Launch, Impact, and Initial Successes**

The North Hudson Partnership began as a flagship initiative of Weehawken Human Services. Less than a year old, this ongoing platform involves more than twenty-five regularly participating organizations from across regional public, private, and nonprofit sectors. At regular monthly meetings, through community programming, and at events that address the breadth of health and wellness concerns, members’ contributions are amplified, enhanced, and facilitated through the North Hudson Partnership to build a culture of health throughout north Hudson.

Weehawken Human Services itself was created at the end of 2018 to promote the health and well-being of all residents, facilitating best-in-sector health, housing, and social services. It achieves its mission by developing and sustaining municipal capacities that address Community Health and Wellness; Housing Services; and Special Services for populations confronted by unique health needs, which currently include veterans, immigrants, and disabled residents.

Weehawken is a small, yet rapidly growing municipality on the Hudson River directly across from Manhattan. Like all communities in its area, Weehawken is experiencing a time of intense change. These demographic and socioeconomic transitions manifest, at least in part, with a risk of health disparities across diverse categories. Among Weehawken Human Services’ first tasks were to ascertain the extent of these disparities, and then facilitate solutions so that all residents could access positive, sustainable health outcomes regardless of background or profile.

Availability of resources constrained initial response. As a small municipality, it was neither feasible, nor prudent to position Weehawken Human Services as a direct service provider. Even if it was part of a much larger organization, it is arguably beyond the sustainable scope of any local government agency to serve as the first-line response to all contemporary health challenges. Nonetheless, while municipal government could not itself directly provide comprehensive services, a robust role existed for Weehawken Human Services to serve as an amplifier, enhancer, and facilitator of existing resources. The North Hudson Partnership was the means via which Weehawken Human Services could best connect area supports to local needs.

Heading into 2019, no structured framework for nonprofit collaboration existed in the northern part of Hudson County. This was unlike the context confronting municipalities located in the southern part of the county, which possessed established, institutional infrastructures to anticipate, assess, and address residents’ needs related to human services and the social determinants of health. No such structures existed locally to help Weehawken and its fellow north Hudson municipalities best leverage nonprofit resources on behalf of residents’ families.

The absence of such a collaborative framework or coordinating platform meant that, despite demonstrable area need, north Hudson residents watched the bulk of countywide funding for human services go elsewhere, to be spent in nearby cities by community and nonprofit agencies independently advancing their own respective missions. Very simply, those other cities possessed the frameworks and platforms necessary to make such partnerships attractive, feasible, and sustainable for partners, to the benefit of residents. To provide comparable outcomes for its own families, Weehawken Human Services worked to create the North Hudson Partnership.

From its inception, the North Hudson Partnership has been a collaborative effort cofounded by community stakeholders addressing community health and wellness. The platform positioned itself from onset as a nexus for such community organizing. Bringing together key leaders from relevant agencies was a challenge that had to be surmounted, to ensure success.

Feedback was solicited from credible nonprofit agencies responsible for providing countywide operations, so to learn how to best nurture a sustainable expansion of services. They remain critical to the initiative's identity and success. Such cofounding agencies include Hudson Partnership CMO (the area's designated Care Management Organization ("CMO")) and Family Partners of Hudson County (the area's designated Family Support Organization ("FSO")).

Relationships with Hackensack Meridian *Health* – Palisades Medical Center, the only hospital located in north Hudson (and thus its largest nongovernmental and institutional health-based stakeholder), remain similarly central to the North Hudson Partnership's decision-making process. Finally, it is necessary to honor the collegial, resource-intensive collaboration between health and human services professionals in fellow north Hudson municipalities, as well as county government, that was a critical factor in this effort's launch; for example, North Bergen Health Department, North Bergen Public Library, Guttenberg Community Affairs Department, and Hudson County Health and Human Services Department all continue to be crucial contributors.

With key stakeholders onboard, the North Hudson Partnership began to set its priorities for the year. Central to the North Hudson Partnership was an attempt to transcend the networking model that is common to other coordinating frameworks. Instead, the hope was to create a programming and professional platform that could advance its own shared priorities, while still nurturing collegiality and mutual accountability among public, private, and nonprofit agencies.

Aligning with the Human Services Value Curve, the platform aspires to be generative in nature, such that outcomes focus on engaging root causes and metrics are sourced from impacted communities. Initial priorities were thus jointly informed by elected leaders' guidance, member organizations' strengths, and data-driven resources like north Hudson's Community Health Needs Assessment ("CHNA"). Elevating awareness of, and access to, the CHNA and similar data-driven sources is one of the North Hudson Partnership's contributions to local health policy; member organizations were well-represented in recent 2019-2021 CHNA sessions and surveys.

One of the North Hudson Partnership's first priorities was to engage the social determinants of health, especially in response to homelessness and home transition. Ongoing efforts include providing for regular updates from the local shelter at the initiative's monthly meetings, facilitating opportunities for member organizations to attend homelessness response working groups, and donation drives. Most importantly, the initiative created an inaugural volunteer effort to staff the Hudson County 2019 Point-In-Time Count of the Homeless ("PIT Count"). The PIT Count is an annual, federally-mandated canvass of homeless populations which directly informs related policy decisions at all echelons of government. The North Hudson Partnership's 2019 effort constituted the first time north Hudson municipalities directly assisted the PIT Count, resulting in a broader canvass covering more than a dozen additional miles. Data from it already informs area homelessness response. Press coverage of this is available here: <https://hudsonreporter.com/2019/01/31/north-hudson-community-canvasses-local-homeless-population/>

With member organizations' feedback positive in after-action assessments of the PIT Count, the North Hudson Partnership next engaged one of north Hudson's leading, CHNA-noted public health concerns: mental health. In the spring of 2019, Weehawken Human Services worked directly with North Hudson Partnership member organizations to lay the groundwork for a broader mental health initiative, providing some of north Hudson's first suicide prevention trainings and hosting Mental Health Day. With these events culminating in 32 stakeholders trained and more than 50 unique households newly connected to resources, the North Hudson Partnership was prepared to launch its Summer Mental Health Initiative. Press coverage of this is available here: <https://hudsonreporter.com/2019/06/11/mental-health-outreach-project-kicks-off/>

June 5<sup>th</sup> through August 28<sup>th</sup>, the North Hudson Partnership hosted a weekly "Mental Health Meet and Greet" series every Wednesday evening, 630pm-8pm, at different public libraries throughout all north Hudson municipalities. These events connected residents to local mental health care providers, helping destigmatize mental health issues and expand awareness of available care options among underserved communities. Mental health professionals serving the north Hudson area introduced themselves to residents, expanding local access to area resources that enhance family readiness and resiliency. The result was a nurturing of accessible, localized, and sustainable communities of care that provide a foundation for further community support.

The series included July 31<sup>st</sup>'s "Healing In North Hudson" Stigma-Free event, hosted in Guttenberg, that connected more than 150 unique households with 29 area agencies. The theme of the evening, "Mental Health Has No Face, Just a Heart," was commemorated in a silhouette art project in which residents had the opportunity to have their silhouette taken, to then be signed by the resident and displayed alongside others in support of mental health awareness. The night was one of Hudson County's largest mental health awareness events. Press coverage of this is available here: <https://hudsonstv.com/healing-in-north-hudson-promotes-mental-health-awareness/>

The North Hudson Partnership's Summer Mental Health Initiative culminated in north Hudson's municipalities passing Stigma-Free resolutions prior to Labor Day. North Hudson is among the first regions in the state wherein all local municipalities have passed such resolutions. Local providers gained greater familiarity with the area, and resident requests for information on available services increased during and following these health education and outreach efforts. Statewide stakeholders noted the North Hudson Partnership's work; NJ Department of Children and Families tweeted, "At DCF, we know that the first step to addressing #Mental Health is to #EndTheStigma. We applaud the work of the North Hudson Partnership and similar coalitions who are raising awareness connecting people to mental health services." Tweet is available here: <https://twitter.com/NJDCF/status/1159838464201768968>

Heading into its second year, the North Hudson Partnership is positioned to continue transforming how human services are both conceived of and delivered throughout north Hudson. Through its facilitation of efforts across public, private, and nonprofit sectors, relevant public health initiatives are contextualized and informed by municipal expertise and priorities, yet delivered at little to no additional municipal expense. The savings this creates are substantial. Future scheduled programs include a Women's Wellness Day. The North Hudson Partnership has the potential to be a permanent contributor to local community health and wellness, while its example can serve as a replicable model for regions in need of such collaborative frameworks.