

PHAP 101: Overview of the Public Health Associate Program: Does My Organization Want to Host an Associate?

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At the end of the session you should be able to identify the mission of PHAP. You'll be able to describe the history of PHAP and better understand how PHAP evolved over the last few years into where it is today. You'll be able to list at least two of the three goals of PHAP. We'd expect that you can name at least three of the characteristics of a typical PHAP associate and candidate for PHAP, and identify the phases of the PHAP application process.

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PHAP's mission. The mission of PHAP is to train and provide experiential learning to early-career public health professionals who contribute to the public health workforce. We focus on early-career public health professionals because they are the future of the public health workforce. There are three main components of the PHAP mission on which we'd like to focus. Number one is that PHAP exists to train and provide experiential learning. PHAP is a training program. PHAP is neither a workforce employment program, nor a job placement program. PHAP, however, is an experiential learning and training program. The second component is that PHAP trains and provides early-career public health professionals. These early-career public health professionals are recent graduates from bachelor's, master's, and sometimes doctoral degree programs that have little to no public health experience, and are no more than two years removed from graduating with their most recent degree. The associates are truly early-career public health professionals. The third component is contributing to the public health workforce. This is a two-year training program; however, over the two-year duration of the training assignment, we would expect that the associate's contribution to your organization's public health activities and workforce will be an important factor in helping you meet the overall vision and mission of your organization.

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So what is PHAP? PHAP is a two-year paid, competency-based training program. The associates that come into the program have little to no public health experience. In addition, these individuals sometimes have little to no

professional work experience— being that they are new graduates from undergraduate or graduate degree programs. Their actual assignment is in one categorical program focus area for the duration of their two-year assignment. What we mean by categorical program focus area is that their assignments can range from a variety of topics, such as cancer, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, immunization, environmental health, and so forth. Associates that are accepted into the program are part of PHAP, placed in potential organizations around the country and our territories, and are federal government employees throughout the duration of PHAP. Associates are expected to adhere to all federal government standards and guidelines, ethics, and practices as any other federal government employee while in the two-year training program. PHAP is an important partnership and collaboration between CDC and our partners. One group of partners are our governmental organizations from state, tribal, local, and territorial health departments that apply, are accepted, and matched with an associate. PHAP is also a collaboration and partnership between CDC and our nongovernmental organizations that also are eligible to apply and be matched with an associate for the two-year training program. The associate's CDC supervisor and host site supervisor or supervisors are integral parts of the partnership and collaboration between CDC and these groups of organizations.

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There are nine PHAP competency domains and a number of sub-competencies in each of these domains. The associate is expected to have opportunities through his or her work activities in your organization over the two years to meet these nine competency domains. These nine areas include: analytic and assessment skills; public health service; program planning, management, and improvement; public health policy and law skills; professionalism skills; communication skills; diversity and inclusion skills; community dimensions of public health skills; and, finally, financial planning and management skills. The work activities that your organization—should you choose to apply to host an associate—should provide an opportunity for the associate to meet all of the nine competency domains. A full list of the competencies and sub-competencies can be found on the CDC's PHAP web site, which is www.cdc.gov/phap. Again, it is www.cdc.gov/phap. These nine competency domains are the foundation upon which the activities and the responsibilities of your associate should be built so that

your associate has every opportunity to meet each of these core competencies.

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We spent some time talking about what PHAP is; now let's spend some time talking about what PHAP is not.

PHAP is not an internship program. The work activities and responsibilities of the associate should be predefined in your application. It will then be a matter of implementing and maintaining the work activities in your application for which the associate will then be responsible over the two-year duration. PHAP is not an administrative staffing support program. Although some activities may involve an administrative aspect or component, the associates are not administrative assistant staffing support for your organization. PHAP is not a federal government employment service. Again, PHAP is a two-year experiential learning and competency-based training program for early-career public health professionals. There is no guarantee of employment after graduation from PHAP. We'll make efforts to provide opportunities and link potential job availabilities to associates graduating from PHAP, but there is no guaranteed job placement after graduation from PHAP. Lastly, PHAP is not a program that provides subject matter experts, or SMEs, to your organization. Although our associates are intelligent and have demonstrated sustained academic success, they are still early-career public health professionals in a training program.

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PHAP has three primary goals, which are known as the win-win-win approach. First, the associate will provide a value-added service to the host site throughout the two-year duration of the training assignment. This may be in traditional public health programs such as HIV/STD/TB prevention, environmental health, a variety of chronic disease programs, or helping support the organization or tribal agency in their efforts to achieve accreditation. It may also be to support local emergency response efforts should the entity or organization be faced with an emergency. The second goal of PHAP is to provide associates with work experience in public health programs and service delivery. Hence why PHAP is not an internship or administrative staffing support program for public health organizations. The leadership of PHAP expects that the associate will receive hands-on experiential learning opportunities in public health programs and actual public health service delivery opportunities. These

opportunities can include disease investigation, disease-specific surveillance, community needs assessment, health promotion, developing tribal safety toolkits, conducting immunization record audits, assisting with developing and staging preparedness and response exercises for key community-based partners, conducting restaurant inspections, screening for chronic disease among American Indian/Alaska Native populations, and developing effective strategies for American Indian/Alaska Native injury prevention. The third goal of PHAP is that the work activities should provide opportunities for the associate to achieve the nine PHAP competencies. It is imperative that we match associates with organizations that can provide work activities and opportunities for the associate to achieve the PHAP competencies and sub-competencies over the two-year duration of the program.

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Over the history of PHAP, associates have supported host sites' efforts to meet its overall program goals. For example, associates have reviewed immunization registries; they have provided support services to public health preparedness programs by integrating public health emergency plans and hospital preparedness programs. Associates have provided capacity-building support to organizations that hosted them for the two-year training assignment. Associates have also provided support in the advancement of public health project initiatives.

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At a minimum, the candidates that are accepted into PHAP have the following:

- A bachelor's degree from an accredited 4-year college or university;
- A 3.0 grade point average on a 4.0 scale;
- Be less than two years removed from graduating with their most recent degree; and
- Have U.S. citizenship or be a permanent resident. U.S. Nationals are also encouraged to apply.

These criteria are both very clear and objective in the first phase of the application process. The candidate will apply to enter the PHAP program through USAJOBS.gov, which is the portal for entry into the federal government service. Once it is determined that the candidate has met all of these criteria, he or she will then go

through an extensive process to evaluate his or her writing capacity and oral communication skills. These are phase two and phase three of the application process.

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What we look for in a candidate is what has been developed into the BEST FIT model characteristics of an ideal associate. The BEST FIT model is an acronym that PHAP has developed to help guide potential candidates in deciding whether PHAP is an appropriate program for the next step in their public health career. The “B” of BEST FIT stands for big-picture thinker. Does the candidate have the capacity to think in a larger scope of public health, and where he or she could possibly fit into the activities of public health as an overall profession? The “E” of BEST FIT, are they an effective communicator? We look at the candidate’s capacity to communicate effectively in writing, as well as orally. The “S” of BEST FIT stands for socially and culturally inclusive. Public health activities will frequently target a variety of populations with diverse social and cultural backgrounds—varying religions, races, ethnicities, creeds, ages, and so forth. We expect that the candidate is socially and culturally aware, and inclusive in their activities. The “T” of BEST FIT stands for thriving in a dynamic environment. Public health can be a very fast-paced and changing environment. The PHAP program itself is a very dynamic program. Someone who is expecting to have a set routine on a daily, weekly, or even monthly basis, will most likely not thrive in PHAP. The “F” of BEST FIT stands for flexible. This is probably the most important characteristic that we look for in a candidate applying to PHAP. They should demonstrate the capacity to adapt to certain changes in activities, programs, and work responsibilities. Flexibility is one of the keys to success as a PHAP associate, and in any career in general. The “I” of BEST FIT stands for intelligence. Candidates must have a minimum of a 3.0 grade point average on a 4.0 scale to be eligible for PHAP. We place confidence that their demonstrated academic success will directly translate into their ability to learn and acquire new skills. PHAP is a program that places associates in the field, and we expect them to apply their mastery of academic concepts, principles, and theories in their delivery of public health services. Therefore, the last “T” of the BEST FIT characteristics model is tactile learner. We expect that the candidates would have a desire to actually apply these academic concepts, principles, and theories while delivering public health services, and engage the

community of their host sites. If you feel that you don't meet all seven of the BEST FIT characteristics, please do not let that discourage you from applying to PHAP. These are the characteristics of an ideal candidate. If you are socially and culturally inclusive, and you are flexible, please apply to PHAP. Tap into the characteristics in which you best excel, in other words, your strengths. Your host site can help you learn all of the characteristics of an ideal associate during the two-year training program.

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Let's talk about the typical host site administrative requirements. One of the requirements that an organization should expect, should they be selected and matched with an associate, is that they will be willing and able to pay for the associate's local travel and training costs during the two-year assignment. This includes the associate's local travel costs to complete work activities, costs associated with attending any local conferences or meetings in which you expect the associate to participate, and training costs for the associate so that he/she can complete the work activities that your organization has proposed. Associates CANNOT travel on host site travel orders using *any* federal funds. Your organization should be able to provide adequate workspace, including a telephone, internet access, a computer, and other necessary work supplies that the associate will need to complete the work activities and his/her assignments over the two-year duration of the training program.

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What we've developed in PHAP is a model called the CO-STARR Model, which is an acronym for the seven core characteristics of a quality PHAP training experience. The CO-STARR Model is the foundation for what we've developed in PHAP 201, "The Strategic Development of a Quality PHAP Training Experience—The CO-STARR Model." This is a more in-depth overview of these seven characteristics that provides technical assistance to organizations that have decided to apply to host an associate. The "C" of CO-STARR stands for core competencies. The organization's proposed work activities for the associate should provide him or her opportunities to achieve the PHAP core competencies over the two-year duration of the training assignment. The "O" of CO-STARR stands for opportunities for advancement. Keep in mind, these opportunities for

advancement are in work activities, not job positions. The work plan that your organization develops should be progressive over the two-year duration. We expect that the activities will be progressive, and that they will build upon each other over the two years. We also expect that the associate would have opportunities to experience and reinforce those acquired skills. The “S” of CO-STARR stands for supervisor involvement. This is the host site supervisor, or the individual in your organization who will have the day-to-day direct responsibility to oversee the work of the associate. There will be a primary and a secondary supervisor that will be expected to provide day-to-day, on-site support; provide guidance and mentorship; oversee the training of the associate; and ensure that he or she is progressing according to the expectations of your organization—as well as the standards of CDC—throughout the entire two-year training assignment. The supervisor is usually the key component to the success or lack of success over the two-year training assignment. We look for individuals who have direct oversight of the work of the associate. These individuals frequently will have years of experience in supervising other employees; have the desire to oversee the work of the associate and be involved in the training of the associate; and have the understanding and appreciation of, potentially, a multigenerational workforce—as many of the associates coming into the program are new, right out of college or graduate school, and may therefore have little to no, work experience, but bring a variety of skills, techniques, and capabilities to the workforce. The “T” of CO-STARR stands for training and development are ongoing. We expect that the associate be rendered opportunities for training and development, and professional advancement throughout the two years in your organization. This could be web-based trainings; one-on-one trainings; observation; partnering and mentoring with subject matter experts in the same program focus area; self-paced skills; or independent research and independent study. There’s a variety of specific training opportunities that we expect be offered to the associate, in addition to what PHAP will offer over the two-year duration for the associate, that your organization will have available to provide to the associate. The “A” of CO-STARR stands for aligns with categorical program goals and strategy. The work activities that the associate is involved in should align with the program goals that your program is funded to provide. They should align with the specific activities; those public health service delivery opportunities should be in alignment with the program goals that your organization is

funded to provide. The first “R” of CO-STARR is realistic for an early-career public health professional. Keep in mind, these associates are sometimes directly out of college or graduate degree programs. They may or may not have any previous work experience, but they are very intelligent, enthusiastic, energized individuals that have demonstrated sustained academic success. We expect that the work activities be commensurate with an early-career public health professional with little to no public health experience. The last “R” of the CO-STARR model is that those public health activities should be robust public health learning experiences for the associate. The associate is there to receive training and experiential learning—that the services in which he or she will be involved and the work activities should be robust public health learning experiences over the entire two-year duration.

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So your organization has listened to PHAP 101, and has decided to apply to host an associate for this next application cycle. Before the application cycle opens, make sure that the proposed work activities are in alignment with the core competencies of the program. The application process can be a year-long process. Specifically focus on the host site supervisor, and that individual who will be best matched to support and oversee the work of the associate for the two-year duration. Focus on training opportunities that your organization will make available to support your associate’s learning. Ensure that the activities are in line with your program goals, and that the activities are robust, realistic services that are for an early-career public health professional. Also, please take PHAP 201: “Strategic Development of a Quality PHAP Training Experience—The CO-STARR Model” webinar, which is a more in-depth approach to the seven core characteristics and providing technical assistance to organizations that are submitting an application to host an associate.

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If there are questions your organization has in the preparation or overview of PHAP, we encourage you to submit questions to <http://www.cdc.gov/PHAP>, which is our website, or to phap@cdc.gov, our email address. This session, again, has been an overview of the Public Health Associate Program, and hopefully has been a great introduction to PHAP and that your organization will consider applying to host an associate. Please take

PHAP 201 as the next step in the process of receiving technical assistance and guidance in the strategic development of a quality PHAP training experience. We thank you for your time. We thank you for your partnership. We encourage many organizations to consider applying to host an associate and look forward to partnering with you, should your applications be accepted and matched with an associate. Be confident that you'll be a great associate. Be confident that you'll be a great host site. Be confident in applying. Thank you.