



GET HIRED IN PUBLIC HEALTH:

# A GUIDE TO WORK EXPERIENCE BEFORE GRADUATION

*Students planning careers in the public health sector can benefit greatly from pre-professional work experience (internships, work study, study abroad and volunteering) when performing their post-graduation job searches. This guide discusses how to identify and land these opportunities, complete with expert advice and resources.*

## INTRODUCTION

Pre-professional work experience is a great transition step from college to career, especially in industries where experience is a virtual must-have for entry-level positions. Pre-professional opportunities help students obtain value industry- and job-specific knowledge and skills that pique employer interest.

Before choosing a pre-professional experience opportunity, it is important to understand the differences between the kinds of opportunities available to college students. Public health pre-professional opportunities fall into the following categories: **Internships, Work-study, Study abroad, Volunteer** and **Peace Corps**.

This guide will:

- Define the differences between these opportunities
- Discuss how to identify and land a position
- Address the process of transitioning to a career
- Provide expert advice and resources

## PRE-PRO OPPORTUNITY BREAKDOWN

### Internships

Internships help students develop professional skills. Internships are often associated with the corporate workplace, but all industries offer programs that allow students to observe real-time operations and learn management styles on a personal level. Organizations typically offer internships during summer and winter breaks, or by the quarter or semester during the school year.

Students have the option to participate in paid (by the hour or in a lump sum stipend) and unpaid internships. Most colleges award credit for unpaid internship experiences. It's important to check with your school to find out if they award internship credit before you get started. Even if you don't receive college credit, the experience can still make a considerable difference during your post-graduation job search.

Public health internships allow students to gain experience in the public health sector, integrating public health theory with community-based practice. Students are able to expand their understanding of the role of health-related agencies, including: organization and policy issues, funding sources, research, administration and program activities. On-the-job training also introduces students to the responsibilities of planning, implementing and administering policies.

All major public health agencies offer internships. The following agencies and associations are just a few examples of agencies that have active internships programs:

- American Public Health Association (APHA)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)
- American Red Cross
- World Health Organization (WHO)

## The Internship Application Process

### Application

Students can obtain applications online at each organization's website. Most programs require the following:

- **Resume with cover letter**
- **Writing sample**
- **3 references**
- **Unofficial transcript**

### Resume

An internship resume should highlight relevant skills and work experience. This is a chance to showcase your strengths, and make it clear why you are a good match for the program.

1. Attach a cover letter as an introduction.
2. Include relevant keywords in your resume, in case the organization scans them electronically.
3. Address your packet to the volunteer coordinator and mention that you will be calling to follow up.

### Writing Sample

Writing samples ascertain whether applicants have the necessary skills to participate in an internship. They should always be well-written, with a well-articulated thesis and a logical structure.

- Follow the guidelines provided with your application.
- Only submit original work.
- Your sample should be relevant to the organization's mission.
- Ask a professor or instructor to proofread your sample.

## References

The individuals you ask to include as references should be able to speak positively about your dedication, such as employers, professors and high-profile industry members. Think carefully about the three people who can best describe your skills and qualities. Some programs require letters of reference while others ask for contact information instead.

## Transcript

Internship applications often require an unofficial transcript. Official transcripts with a school seal are available from your school's registrar office. Unofficial transcripts are usually available for download through your school's career center or a related department.

## Deadlines

Summer internships are very competitive. Students begin to apply for them 7-9 months in advance, although application deadlines vary. Government organizations tend to have the earliest deadlines because of the large number of applicants interested in the positions. Government organizations also need to leave time to complete background checks. More organizations are offering winter internships between semesters. There is less competition for internships that take place during the school year.

## Interviews

If asked to come in for an interview, start preparing right away.

- Find out who will be performing the interview so you can greet them by name.
- Plan to arrive to the interview approximately 15 minutes early. Dress professionally. Being well-groomed is a must.
- Exude confidence. Smile often and be ready to ask questions. You want to impress the interviewer with your accomplishments without appearing to brag, which can be a delicate balance.

## Resources

### 2014 Student Opportunities in Public Health

The Office of Minority Health and Health Equity (OMHHE) sponsors the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Undergraduate Health Scholars Program to increase awareness of minority public health.

### APHA Public Health Policy Internships

Interns receive hands-on public health experience, learning about climate change, health reform, chemical exposures, food safety, health equity and more.

### **APHA Global Policy Internships**

Interns contribute to the organization's webpage and newsletter, attend seminars and conferences, and organize visits from international health professionals.

### **APHA Public Affairs and Advocacy: Transportation and Public Health**

Intern responsibilities may include developing case studies, general research assignments, attending meetings and capturing minutes.

### **US Dept. of Health and Human Services Public Health Internship Program**

Interns spend a semester rotating within one of HRSA's Bureaus or Offices, interacting with experts from areas that may include: rural health policy, HIV/AIDS, maternal and child health and health systems.

### **American Red Cross Summer Internship Program**

A variety of internship programs that give undergraduates exposure to real-world work experience, by involving them in projects critical to the day-to-day work of the organization.

### **Children's Defense Fund Internship Program**

Program made up of 8-12 week experiences during: Summer, Fall, and Winter/Spring.

### **Partners In Health Internships and Fellowships**

Current internship opportunities and application information.

### **National Partnerships for Women and Families**

Summer Workplace Internships and application information.

### **PHF Learning Resource Center Marketing and Communications Internship**

Internship opportunities and related information.

### **US Dept. of Health and Human Services Pathways for Students and Recent Graduates Internships**

Program that provides internships for students from high school through graduate school.

### **Thurgood Marshall College Foundation/CDC Student Ambassador Program and Internship**

Program designed to attract minority students to public health careers and increase minority representation in the public health workforce.

### **Occupational Health Internship Program**

National summer internship dedicated to helping students learn about occupational safety and health for working people.

### **Morehouse College Project IMHOTEP Minority Health**

11-week internship designed to increase knowledge and skills in biostatistics, epidemiology, and occupational safety and health.

### **CDC Program in Environmental Health**

Paid 10-week internship for students majoring in Environmental Health to participate in activities with the Environmental Health Services Branch of the National Center for Environmental Health.

### **CDC Collegiate Leaders in Environmental Health**

Paid 10-week summer internship program for students majoring in Environmental Health.

### **Health Communications Internship Program**

Internship opportunities in Health Communication.

### **Do Something Internship Program**

Paid Public Health internship database.

### **Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health Internship Program**

Internship opportunities for students of ASPPH members.

### **Junior Commissioned Officer Student Training and Extern Program (JRCOSTEP)**

Interns work in the same Federal agencies and programs as active duty Commissioned Corps officers.

## **WORK-STUDY**

Work-study and cooperative education programs are part of a structured learning model that combines academic instruction with practical work experience. These opportunities give students a chance to actively participate in the workforce while they learn about the industry. Since employers prefer candidates with work experience, a work-study position helps job seekers stand out in a crowd of applicants.

Post-secondary institutions with cooperative education programs:

- **Antioch College Cooperative Education Program** (Yellow Springs, OH) Four 12-week terms as paid full-time employees in local, national, and international settings, blending the world of work, theory, and practice.
- **Drexel University “The Ultimate Internship” Cooperative Education Program** (Philadelphia, PA). “The Ultimate Internship” includes access to Internet-based job database to submit resumes and request interviews with hundreds of companies.
- **Northeastern University Cooperative Education and Career Development** (Boston, MA). The largest co-op program in US. Involves 5,000 students and more than 2500 co-op employers around the globe. Partners with Boston Youth Fund, run by Boston Youth council and provides summer job and enrichment placement for the City of Boston.

Work-study also refers to the Federal Work Study (FWS) program, which provides part-time jobs on campus or at approved non-profit organizations to help students pay for the costs involved with post-secondary education. There are 3,400 participating colleges and universities in the FWS program, each of which had to apply to the U.S. Dept. of Education to be included. The FWS program encourages students to get involved with community service work and other work related to the student's course of study.

FWS is a need-based form of financial aid for undergraduate, vocational and graduate students. The student's school and employer pay up to 50 percent of wages, and the remainder is paid for with federal funds. The benefit of taking a work-study position is that it does not impact your financial aid eligibility, because the federal government does not count it as income.

Students can find public health work-study jobs at the following places:

- Colleges and universities
- Federal, state or local public agencies
- Private nonprofit organization
- Private for-profit organization

Wages depend on the student's established level of financial need, as well as the school's funding level. Undergraduates are paid on an hourly basis. Schools are required to make payments directly to the student at least once a month, unless the student arranges to use wages to pay for institutional charges (tuition, fees, room and board).

The first step in securing a Public Health work-study job is to apply for financial aid. Students must file a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), available at <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov>. It is the student's responsibility to make sure the institution they attend participates in the FWS program. It's important to apply early, because opportunities are filled on a first-come, first-served basis.

Opportunities are posted on job banks or at the school's financial aid office. Most positions require students to interview first to ensure the position is a good fit for everyone involved. Hiring is done at the employer's discretion.

## Work Study Resources

### Federal Student Aid

Comprehensive information about the Federal Student Aid program, includes access to guides, videos and a PowerPoint presentation

### Work-Study Programs

Work-study information by the Illinois Student Assistance Commission.

### Funding Your Education: The Guide to Federal Student Aid

Detailed government guide to Federal Student Aid program.

### 2014-15 Work Study Handbook

Published by Thomas Jefferson University.

### Prospective Students Guide

Published by the Association of Schools and Public Health.

### Summer Program Overview

Published by the Division of Cancer Epidemiology and Genetics.

### National Co-Op Scholarship Program

Open to students enrolled in cooperative education programs.

### What Is Cooperative Education

An informational guide written and published by Georgia State University.

## Health Sciences Cooperative Education

A guide published by Northeastern University Bouve College of Health Sciences.

# STUDY ABROAD

Public health majors can find global health opportunities through their postsecondary institution or directly through study abroad organizations that send volunteers all over the world. Students can become involved in a wide range of available experiences, including:

- Assisting the elderly
- Assisting at public hospitals
- Teaching languages
- Working in community clinics
- Conducting nutrition classes
- Providing treatment
- Implementing health programs
- Supporting cancer patients

Spots to study abroad in the summer months fill quickly, usually by the fall or early winter. Applications are available online at study abroad organization websites.

These experiences do come with costs, but fees often cover full-time tuition, housing and most meals. Students should look into federal and state financial aid options before signing up. Study abroad organizations also offer scholarships.

## Study Abroad Resources

### Global Crossroad Volunteer Program

International volunteer organizations for undergraduate and graduate students to explore.

### Bridge Volunteers

Language instruction, teacher training, and translation & interpretation services.

### CIEE Study Abroad

Non-profit, non-governmental international exchange organization.

### SIT Study Abroad (Chile)

Research alternative healthcare practices in Chile and southern Peru.

### Danish Institute for Study Abroad (Public Health)

Northern European perspective on salient aspects of public health.

### **Alliance for Global Education**

Manipal University's global health program/

### **The Education Abroad Network**

Small boutique organization specializing in study abroad opportunities for college students.

### **The School for Field Studies**

Wildlife Management Studies and Public Health- Kenya and Tanzania.

### **AIFS Study Abroad Programs- Public Health**

Study abroad programs specific to public health since 1964.

### **CEA International Internships and Service Learning Volunteering**

Provides international education opportunities to explore global issues.

### **Unite for Sight**

Healthcare delivery organization that offers immersive global health education opportunities in eye care.

### **Foundation for International Medical Relief of Children**

Non-profit organization that manages community outreach efforts and health education programs.

### **AmeriCares**

Non-profit emergency response and global health organization.

## **VOLUNTEER WORK**

Many groups and organizations offer volunteer opportunities to raise awareness about their cause. Students usually decide to volunteer for two reasons: a strong desire to help out, and/or the need to meet volunteer requirements for graduation. Volunteering also helps students to stand out in job searches after graduation. A large number of scholarships require candidates to have some type of community service experience.

When you select a quality volunteer position, you receive valuable career experience while contributing to the health and well-being of the community you serve. You also have the chance to learn from professionals while building a professional network.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013), individuals with higher levels of education, particularly college graduates, volunteered at higher rates than those with less education. Among men and women age 25 and over, 39.8 percent of those with college degrees volunteered, compared with 16.7 of men and women with a high school degree only.

The more flexible you are with your schedule, the easier it will be to find an opportunity. To find volunteer work in the public health sector:

1. Contact your city or county health department. They can help you find opportunities with local public health associations.
2. Contact national public health organizations. They can direct you to volunteer programs in your area.
3. Contact global health programs sponsored by American organizations who send public volunteers all over the world.



## Volunteer Resources

### Student Worksite Experience Program

Volunteer program at the Center for Disease Control.

### Do Something

Organization for social change with 2.5 million members.

### NACCHO University

Education platform by the National Association of County and City Health Officials.

### USA EPA Organization Chart

Contact volunteer coordinators in any department at the Environmental Protection Agency.

### US EPA OnCampus ecoAmbassadors

Program that implements projects to help keep campuses green and promote environmental awareness.

### Florida Volunteer Health Services

Florida Department of Health volunteer opportunities.

### Internships and Volunteer Opportunities

County of Los Angeles Public Health volunteer opportunities.

### VolunteerMatch.org

Matches citizens with current volunteer openings in their area.

### Habitat for Humanity

Organizes the construction of houses for needy families across the country.

### Volunteer.gov

A government maintained portal for information on volunteer opportunities in the U.S.

### United We Serve

President Obama's service initiative.

## Peace Corps

The Peace Corps, an international volunteer program, has provided service work to improve the lives of people in communities around the world for over 50 years. Students learn new languages, gain leadership and international development experience while working alongside partners and friends in their host countries. (To date, the Peace Corps has worked in over 139 countries.)

According to the Peace Corps, "Volunteers promote behavior and organizational change, including health systems planning and coordination by working with organizations and/or with ministries of health at the district, regional, and national levels."

Issues that concern the Peace Corps include:

- Climate change
- Food security
- Gender equality and empowerment

The average time spent in a Peace Corps volunteer program is 27 months. Students are placed in over 70 countries. You can share your geographical preference, but the primary goal is to place volunteers where their skills and experience are needed most. The Peace Corps program pays travel expenses to and from your country of service.

Volunteers also receive a living allowance that enables them to live in a manner similar to the local people in their community. In addition, volunteers receive complete medical and dental care. When volunteers return home after a 27-month commitment, they are given a stipend to assist with the transition back home.

If you have Perkins, Stafford, direct and consolidation loans, you may defer payment during your service. Volunteers with Perkins loans are eligible for a 15 percent cancellation of their outstanding balance for each year of Peace Corps service. Contact your lender for information about your situation. The Peace Corps accepts applications on a rolling basis. It takes two to three weeks to hear from a recruiter after completing your application. The entire application process takes nine months, so the organization encourages applicants to begin the process 9-12 months prior to when they want to start their service.

In addition to being at least 18 years of age and a US citizen, applicants must meet minimum education and experience qualifications. To increase your chances of being accepted, get relevant experience as you move through the application process. The Peace Corps recommends building the following skillsets to make your application stand out.

- Agriculture Economics with or without a foreign language
- Forestry with French
- Environment with Spanish
- Agriculture with Spanish or French
- TEFL/TESL with classroom teaching
- Teaching credential (BA/BS)

You can also call 855-855-1961 to speak with a recruiter about how to strengthen your application.

## Peace Corps Resources

- [How to strengthen your application](#)

- [How to become a volunteer](#)

- [Peace Corp Health Videos on Youtube](#)

- [Peace Corp Health Photos on Flickr](#)

- [Peace Corps Catalog](#)
- [Becoming A More Competitive Candidate](#)
- [Peace Corps Blogs](#)
- [Huffington Post article: "Peace Corps Service Provides Career Options"](#)
- [Article- Director of the Peace Corps](#)
- [Hub Pages: So You Want to Join the Peace Corps](#)
- [Peace Corps Inspires Public Health Commitment \(Video\)](#)
- [Community Health Global Innovations](#)
- [Baltimore Sun Peace Corps Articles](#)
- [Peace Corps 101](#)
- [What the Peace Corps is Looking for in a Volunteer Applicant](#)

## TOP CAREERS IN PUBLIC HEALTH

The public health sector is one of the most diverse career fields available. You can pursue a career in public health with a wide range of interests, talents and skills. Public health jobs are found in:

- Professional organizations
- Colleges and universities
- Insurance companies
- Hospitals
- Pharmaceutical companies
- Government (Local, county, state and federal)
- Health agencies
- Non-profit organizations

### Six Public Health Careers

1. **Environmental Epidemiologist** (median average salary \$65,270)

Environmental epidemiologists study chemical and biological environmental factors to determine how they affect public health. They work in a variety of environments, including health departments, hospitals and colleges. They also work out in the field conducting interviews and collecting samples. Upper-level positions require a master's degree. Projected job growth for 2012 to 2022 is 10 percent.

2. **Biostatistician** (\$75,560)

Biostatisticians perform in-depth biological and chemical research and analyze data with statistical methods. Entry-level positions require a bachelor's degree while high-level positions require a minimum of a master's degree. Very high job growth is expected from 2012 to 2022, estimated at 27 percent. This is because of the widespread use of statistical analysis to make informed healthcare policy decisions.

3. **Nutritionist** (\$55,240)

Public health careers in nutrition vary from positions as nutritional consultants to dietary managers. These careers involve the in-depth study of nutrition on public health. Nutritionists can find employment with a bachelor's degree, although there are more opportunities at the master's level. Significant job growth is expected from 2012 to 2022, estimated at 22 percent. This is because the public is becoming more aware of healthy dietary habits, and an increasing number of patients have to monitor their nutrition due to diseases like diabetes.

4. **Health administrator** (\$88,580)

Health administrators oversee health and human services departments in public and private organizations. They plan, direct and coordinate medical and health services in a variety of settings. Higher-level positions require a master's degree. Expected job growth from 2012 to 2022 is 23 percent, because of the increasing aging population requiring medical services.

5. **Environmental scientist** (\$63,570)

Environmental scientists apply their knowledge of natural sciences to protecting the environment and human health in offices and laboratories. They may specialize in pollution control, waste reduction or advising policy. Entry-level jobs typically require a bachelor's degree. Expected job growth for environmental scientists from 2012 to 2022 is 15 percent, as increasing demands continue to be placed on the environment by population growth.

## CAREERS IN PH: TRANSITIONING FROM PRE-PRO TO CAREER

So you have pre-professional experience. You graduated with a public health degree. What comes next? How do you make the transition to a career in the public health sector?

1. Explore public health agency websites for job opportunities. Here is a partial list of agencies that post positions on their websites.

- **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration**
- **US Department of Agriculture**
- **US Department of Health & Human Services**
- **US Agency for International Development**
- **Health Resources and Services Administration**
- **Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality**
- **US Food and Drug Administration**
- **Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion**
- **National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health**

2. Contact your local or state health department or check their websites for vacancies.

3. Check non-profit websites for job listings. Working for a non-profit can help you repay student loans through the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program. Individuals can apply for forgiveness of the remaining balance of Direct Loans after making 120 qualifying payments while employed full-time by a qualifying employer.

4. Search public health job portals such as [PublicHealthJobs.net](#) or [Public Health Jobs Worldwide](#).

5. Explore career development and job search resources at your college or university's Career Planning Office.

In addition, if you graduated within the past two years, you may want to pursue the National Institutes of Health's [Pathways Recent Graduates Program](#). It offers participants developmental experiences in the Federal Government that can be converted to full-time employment after completion.