Expanding Capacity Through Internships

2026 All-In Administrators Session

MISSOURI PUBLIC HEALTH INSTITUTE

Gauging the Room – Raise Your Hand If:

- You've never hosted a student intern, practicum student, or APEx student.
- You've thought about hosting a student but haven't taken the first step.
- You've hosted a student at least once.
- You've supervised multiple students or served as a preceptor.
- You feel confident that your agency has the infrastructure needed to support a successful student experience.

Agenda

- The Opportunity
- Structuring Opportunities for Success
- Precepting Students
- Building Your Internship Infrastructure
- Getting Started
- Activity: Brainstorming Potential Project Ideas

The Intern Opportunity

The Reality

- LPHA Staff Wear A Lot of Hats
- Administrators Stretched Thin
- The "When We Have Time"
- Accreditation
- Decreased Funding
- High Turn Over
- Increased Interest in Public Health Among Students

The Opportunity

- Move from "We Should Do This" to "Someone is Working On that "
- Increased Students, Decreased Opportunities
- Workforce Pipeline Development.
- Increased Visibility of Governmental Public Health Careers.
- Opportunity for New Perspective
- Workforce Development Opportunity for Current Staff
- Potential Future Staff
- Personal Reward

Benefits to Students

- Remote
- Flexible
- Adapting Classroom Learning to Real-World Practice & Realities
- Exposure to Governmental Public Health
- Professional Networking & Shadowing
- Build Soft Skills

Myths

- Not Enough Work for a Student
- Create More Work than They're Worth
- You Need the Perfect Project
- Students Don't Have Enough Experience to Contribute
- Only Large LPHAs or Those Close to Universities Can Host
- Student Expect Paid Opportunities

Structuring Opportunities for Success

What Makes a Good Project

- Addresses Real Agency Need
- High Value, Lower Risk Work
- Flexible Approaches or Defined Examples for Success
- Connects to the Bigger Picture of Your Agency's Work
- Foundation-Building Projects
- Staff Guidance Without Constant Supervision
- Aligns with Academic Requirements & Competencies
- Benefits from Fresh Perspective & New Ideas
- Creates Value For the Agency & the Student

Creating Structure & Support for Students

- Strong Orientation
- Clear Expectations & Communication
- Connecting Project to Bigger Picture
- Build In Time for Feedback and Corrections
- Match Students to the Right Preceptor
- Schedule Regular Check-Ins

Matching Students to the Right Project

Graduate

- Concentrations
  - MPH Generalist
  - Health Management & Policy
  - Epidemiology
  - Maternal & Child Health
  - Global Health
- Projects
  - More Strategic / Technical

Undergraduate

- Offers more variety in potential projects
- Best for Exploration Stage or Less Technical Assistance Needed

Precepting Students

What is a Preceptor?

An experienced professional who guides, teaches, and supervises a student during real-world, hands-on training.

- Bridges Theory & Practice
- Supervises Work & Provides Feedback
- Acts as a Role Model
- Serves as Point of Contact for Academic Institution

Becoming an Approved Preceptor

- Different Requirements, Based on the University
- Required for Experiences Involving Academic Credit
- Using a Matrix Model for Experiences to Share the Load
- Easy Process
- Can be Done During Student Onboarding

What We've Learned

- A Dedicated Coordinator Makes Everything Easier
- Hard to Get Started
- Upfront Planning Takes the Most Time
- Not Every Student or Project Will Be the Right Fit
- Strong Onboarding Sets the Foundation
- Weekly Check-Ins Prevent Small Issues from Becoming Big Ones
- The Best Preceptors Balance Expertise with Availability
- Leverage Subject Matter Experts Without Requiring Them to Be the Primary Preceptor
- Feedback & Course Corrections are Part of the Process
- The Return on Investment Increases with Good Infrastructure

Building Your Infrastructure

Brainstorming Projects

1. Identify Pain Points
   - What is something we know we need to do but have not had time to move forward?
2. Connect it to an Agency Priority
   - Which agency goal, plan, requirement, or pressure point does this support?
3. Define the Student Friendly Project
   - What could a student realistically produce?
4. Identify Level of Student Needed
5. Identify Internal Supports Needed
   - Who would the student meet with?
   - What documents or data would they need?
   - What decisions would staff need to make?
   - What parts need to stay staff responsibility?
6. Check Scope
   - How many hours will project take to complete?
   - What is the minimum useful project is time runs short?

Connecting to Schools

- Start With
  - One University, Degree Level
  - Existing Relationships
  - Schools with relevant programs and certifications
- Utilize Your Other Connections
  - MOPHI
  - Pathways Program

Planning Timeline Before Semester

2-3 Months	6-8 Weeks	3-6 Weeks
Build Semester Timeline	Connect With Schools	Review Applications
Identify Potential Projects	Advertise Opportunities	Conduct Interviews
Confirm Staff Leads / Preceptors	Accept Applications	Select Candidates
Determine Any Available Budget	Create Interview Questions	Extend Offers
Create Advertising Materials		
Identify Application Process		

Additional Info:

- *Students Begin Looking 2-3 Months Before Semester*
- *Students Deadlines Typically Within First Two Weeks of Semester*

MOPHI Assistance

- Brainstorm student-friendly projects.
- Match Projects to Undergraduate or Graduate Student Levels.
- Provide a Connection to Existing Academic Partners.
- Sharing Templates & Examples
  - Advertising
  - Application Process
  - Screening & Interview Questions
  - Student Onboarding & Expectations
  - Preceptor Expectations & Check-In Structures
- Serve as Preceptor for Members

Tips

- Don't Rush, Build the Basic Infrastructure First
- Gain Staff Buy-In Early
- Start Small & Scale Up Over Time
- Identify a Staff Coordinator
- Focus on Experience/ Project Quality Before Student Quantity
- Create Tools Once, Then Reuse and Improve Them
- Set Expectations Early for Students and Staff
- Use as a Quality Improvement Opportunity

Project Ideas

Accreditation & Foundational Capabilities

- Documentation inventory and gap checklist
- Evidence organization by PHAB domain
- Draft templates for policies, procedures, or meeting documentation
- Staff interview guide to identify existing evidence
- Accreditation readiness resource binder
- Training handouts or quick guides for staff

Strategic Resource Sharing

- Inventory of shared services opportunities across neighboring LPHAs or community partners
- Cross-agency resource map
- Research on models & best practices
- Summary of potential barriers and decision points

CHA/CHIP & Community Engagement

- Secondary data compilation
- Creation of data graphics
- Data narratives
- Survey summary or basic analysis
- Community partner inventory
- Focus group planning materials
- Plain-language data snapshots
- CHIP implementation tracking tool
- Partner meeting agenda and follow-up tracker

Performance Management & QI

- KPI inventory
- Dashboard mock-up
- Data collection process map
- QI process documentation
- PDSA documentation template
- Monthly performance reporting
- Staff survey on current data use

Workforce Development

- Training needs assessment
- New employee onboarding checklist
- Supervisor resource guide
- Cross-training inventory
- Public health career pathway handout
- Internship recruitment plan

Communications & Partner Engagement

- Website content refresh
- Plain-language service descriptions
- Partner newsletter template
- Community resource guide
- Social media calendar
- Annual report story collection template

Questions?

Thank you!

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