

Framework for the CDC-APHL Public Health Laboratory Workforce Strategic Plan

OVERVIEW

This report presents the draft framework for a strategic plan to strengthen the nation’s public health laboratory (PHL) workforce. The strategic plan itself will be released in the spring of 2014. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Association of Public Health Laboratories (APHL) will use the strategic plan in shaping their efforts to recruit, educate, train, and build the PHL workforce needed to address the challenges of the 21st century.

Driver: The Laboratory Efficiencies Initiative

At the CDC director’s request, CDC and APHL created the Laboratory Efficiencies Initiative (LEI) in 2011 to lead the transformation of the nation’s PHL network into one that is sustainable and better integrated. The LEI is helping PHLs across the nation operate more efficiently. More information about the LEI may be found at:

https://www.aphlweb.org/aphl_departments/qs/Projects/lei/default.aspx.

Workforce development is an important LEI priority. PHL professionals must master needed skills in an environment where chronic budget constraints, accelerated technological change, and rapidly shifting relationships between public health agencies and health care providers pose both remarkable opportunities and significant challenges.

On May 13-14, 2013, CDC and APHL convened a workgroup to kick off development of a PHL workforce strategic plan. The twenty-nine participants included state and local PHL directors, a nationally known informatics expert, a senior Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) program manager, CDC scientists and other staff, as well as APHL staff. The goal of the meeting was to develop a shared, overarching strategy to strengthen current workforce development activities and define new approaches to assure an adequate number of competent, well-trained, and qualified professionals for the PHL workforce now and in the future.

Approach and Key Points

The workgroup adopted the LEI strategic plan and the CDC-sponsored “Roadmap for Developing the National Public Health Workforce Strategy” (a product of the 2012 Modernizing the Workforce for the Public’s Health summit, available at

<http://www.cdc.gov/ophss/csels/dsepd/strategic-workforce-activities/ph-workforce/summit.html>) as guideposts and focused on four objectives:

- Identifying critical deficiencies and gaps in workforce development
- Recommending and prioritizing strategies and key activities to address short- and long-term needs
- Crafting creative solutions to workforce recruitment, retention, and development
- Establishing, enhancing, and maintaining strategic alliances and national partnerships to leverage and enable collaborative workforce development initiatives

This strategic plan framework recommends a series of strategic activities to improve PHL workforce development. This framework responds directly to the December 2012 recommendation of the Advisory Committee to the CDC Director that CDC “should lead a coordinated effort, with active engagement by external and internal partners, to address vital [public health] workforce gaps”.

FRAMEWORK

A. Strategic Intent

During the May 2013 meeting, the workgroup drafted the *strategic intent* of the PHL workforce development strategy. This intent, tempered by the constraint of existing resources, was articulated in two intent statements that describe principles, trade-offs, and outcome measures to guide the agenda for PHL workforce development. After considerable discussion, the consensus among the group was to concentrate on one general aspect of workforce, namely recruitment and retention.

INTENT STATEMENT 1: Encourage/help science majors to choose the PHL over other career options.

The principles that will guide decisions/efforts are:

- Influence/educate system partners to teach with relevant PHL examples.
- Educate influencers (counselors/advisors) so they can inform students about PHL careers.
- Collaborate with existing partners and develop new partnerships to achieve common goals.
- Use resources (e.g., staff, programs) already in existence.
- Create a clear message for others to use.
- Develop templates and tools that could be customized and used locally.
- Become a part of education programs when feasible (e.g., guest lecturers).
- Offer relevant experiences/internships in PHLs for interested students.
- Track outcomes of those who intern in PHLs.
- Train our own personnel to be effective mentors.

- Advocate for loan forgiveness programs to attract graduates to fill chronic PHL vacancies.
- Prioritize time for these activities.

Beyond Scope:

- Developing new training/teaching programs.
- Taking sole responsibility for making this work.

Success will be evident when:

- # of students applying for internships increases
- # of science students focusing on public health as an option increases
- # of available internships that are filled increases
- # of times PHL scientists are asked back to lecture in courses increases
- # PHLs vacancies decrease as a result of these activities.

INTENT STATEMENT 2: Provide PHL staff resources to ensure mobility within the PHL system.

The principles that will guide decisions/efforts are:

- Upper management will develop career paths and will be responsible for ensuring that, starting with employee orientation, that staff is introduced to the process for advancement via career paths.
- Educational requirements will be clearly defined by position and category.
- Position descriptions will be aligned with specified PHL competencies currently under development and which will be available to all employees.
- The PHL system and each PHL organization will foster a safe environment for workplace mobility. (Staff should feel comfortable in applying for positions in other areas or other PHLs.)
- The PHL system and each PHL organization will foster/support environments that value employees who elect not to seek advancement.
- Professional development opportunities will be provided and will include cross-training and Public Health 101 (an overview of the history of public health, including public health milestones and a section on the specific components of PHLs).
- Assure that there is a bridge between fellowship and internship experiences and permanent job positions, as well as transitional bridges between different job positions.

Beyond Scope:

- Guaranteeing career advancement or salary increases.

Success will be evident when:

- All positions that are vacant above the entry level have multiple, qualified internal candidates.
- Time to fill positions will decrease.
- # of positions filled from within will increase.

B. Strategic Goals Development

Once consensus on intent was achieved, the workgroup was charged with developing goals for the PHL workforce strategy plan.

Mapping PHL Strategic Goals to the National Public Health Workforce Strategy Roadmap

Each of the goals for the PHL workforce strategy development was built upon and cross-referenced to the “Roadmap for Developing the National Public Health Workforce Strategy.” The workgroup customized the Roadmap — which graphically describes an overarching objective, four goals, and a series of supporting strategies that support each respective goal — to focus on the PHL workforce (see pg. 6).

Goals highlighted in the customized PHL roadmap are the ones that the workgroup considered were relevant to either Intent Statement 1 or 2. The workgroup then prioritized 3-4 focal areas (supporting strategies) for each Intent Statement in order of impact and importance, keeping in mind what would be feasible to address within the current resource-constrained environment.

There was also a recognition that the stakeholders participating in this effort may need to leverage additional assistance, skills, or expertise from other partners, organizations, and leaders in order to successfully accomplish these goals. The stakeholders whose representatives participated in the planning session hold some of those assets. In cases where there is a gap or a deficit in resources, partnering with others can secure needed assets.

The workgroup identified the following twelve assets as required to achieve the goals and strategic actions. The group identified three asterisked assets as top priorities.

- a. Building and maintaining content (language, narrative, case scenarios, models, examples, tools, resources, contact information) for applicable websites and web pages
- b. Talent movement and job/opportunity listings
- c. Prioritize workforce projects and assign leads and partners to develop an action plan to complete projects
- d. Network of people (speakers, mentors, etc.)

- e. Mechanism(s) to distribute and access PHL materials, content, messaging
- f. Marketing, planning tools and resources
- g. Talent assessments
- h. Storytelling/Messaging**
- i. Competency development and maintenance
- j. Fiscal/Funding creativity**
- k. Linking with broad health trends and partnerships
- l. Evaluation/Data and measures – comparative effectiveness**

Activity Development

The graphic PHL Roadmap graphic shows the overarching, strategic objective of “Strengthening the public health laboratory workforce to improve the public’s health,” at the top. Four major goals support this objective:

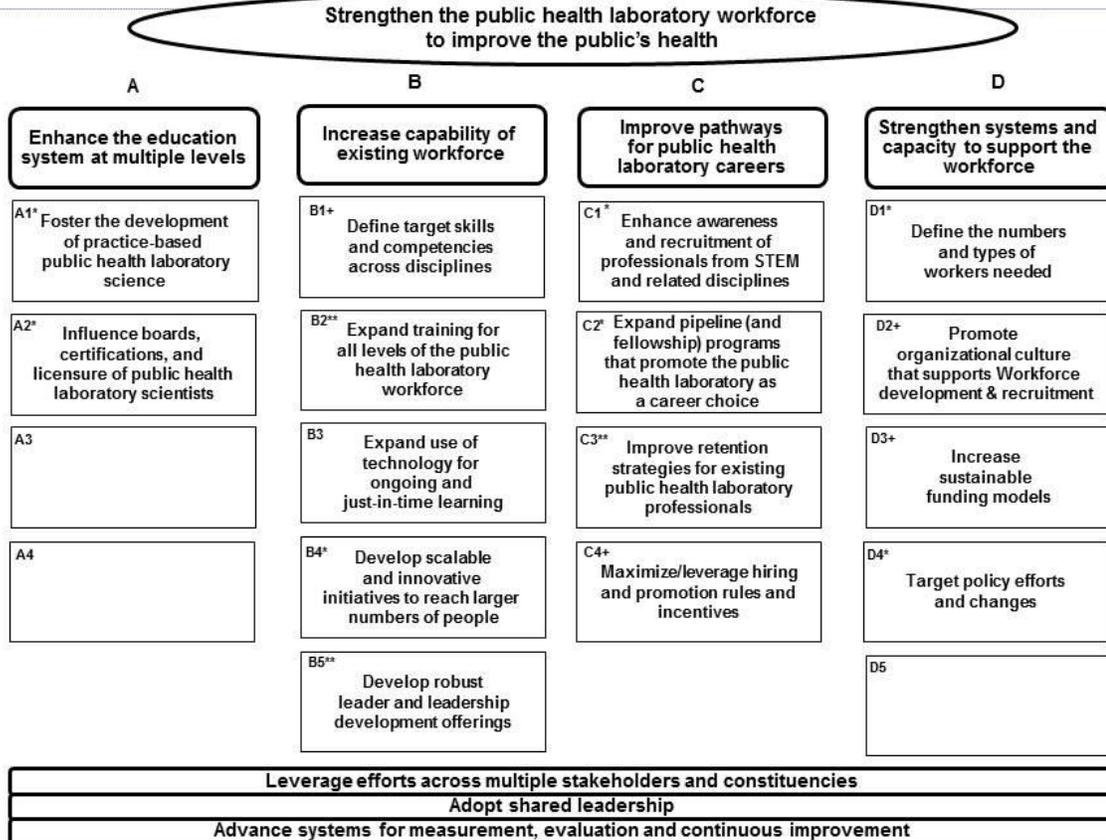
- A. Enhance the education system at multiple levels;
- B. Increase the capability of the existing PHL workforce;
- C. Improve pathways for PHL careers; and,
- D. Strengthen systems and capacity to support the PHL workforce.

Under each goal, 3-4 supporting strategies (or focal areas) were proposed. These were developed in the May 2013 meeting by facilitated breakout discussions for each of the supporting strategies: proposed activities, innovations, gaps and challenges, performance measures, and potential partners or stakeholders. (Because of limited time, it was not possible to address all the elements.)

During the last session of the meeting, workgroup participants voted for the proposed activities each person considered to be the highest priorities. In the following whole-group discussion, a general consensus developed that while Goal A was very important, it would require significant resources and, potentially, a lengthy timeframe. As such, the group decided to focus on Goals B, C, and D, which would likely result in maximum impact with the currently available resources.

The graphic roadmap below illustrates the supporting strategies deemed relevant to Intent Statement #1 (*), Intent Statement #2 (**), and those for both statements (+).

Public Health Laboratory Workforce Development Strategic Roadmap



Key to Figure 1

* indicates supporting strategies/focal areas related to Intent Statement #1 (A1, A2, B4, C1, C2, D1, D4)

** indicates supporting strategies/focal areas related to Intent Statement #2. (B2, B5, C3)

+ indicates supporting strategies/focal areas related to both Intent Statements. (B1, C4, D2, D3)

C. Themes, Priorities, and Action Items

For Intent Statement 1: Encourage/help science majors to choose the PHL over other career options.

Goal B: Increase capability of existing PHL workforce

Focal Area 1: Define target skills and competencies across disciplines

Focal Area 4: Develop scalable and innovative initiatives to reach larger numbers of people

Regarding Focal Area 1 in support of Goal B, an initiative is currently well underway to develop a comprehensive set of PHL workforce competencies. There was consensus among the group that the competencies project is, and continues to be, a priority and therefore did not need to be included in the voting process. Through a deliberate, step by step process, the competency project team has identified and achieved consensus on 14 domains. Each domain was assigned to a workgroup team that drafted competencies for graduated levels of positions from beginner/entry level through expert. These collective domain documents were reviewed prior to launching a broader review and vetting process to solicit feedback on this body of work. Once the domain documents are revised and the collective document goes through CDC clearance and is published, it will be the first comprehensive set of PHL workforce competencies ever developed.

Goal C: Improve pathways for PHL careers

Focal Area 1: Enhance awareness and recruitment of professionals from STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) and related disciplines

Proposed activities:

1. Develop a marketing plan to promote awareness about PHL science (18 votes)
 - a. Develop set of slides with standard message customized to target audiences (2 votes)
 - b. Develop a set of five overview slides re: PHLs and the PHL system
 - c. Collect success stories
 - d. Use social media to implement marketing plan (2 votes)
2. Define partners to assist in the distribution of messages (1 vote)
3. Implement the marketing plan
4. Develop KSAs for human resources departments to promote profession at recruitment events (5 votes)
5. Develop national speakers' bureau for PHL science
6. Leverage CDC promotional resources and deploy locally (co-brand)
7. Incorporate case studies/develop repository of case studies (3 votes)
8. Explore ways to put our content on others' web sites

Recommendations from the group included the following innovative strategies:

- Seek help from corporate sponsors/partners/foundations to access skills/capabilities
- Create virtual knowledge repository that is interactive and encourage practice of providing feedback that rates the value of resource

- Generate webinar to inform state PHLs and PHL stakeholders about the repository and speakers' bureau
- "It's not about the paycheck, it's about the payoff."
- Competition for award to promote PHLs

Focal Area 2: Expand pipeline and fellowship programs that promote the public health laboratory as a career choice

Proposed activities:

1. Inventory activities that promote PHL careers. (12 votes)
 - a. Internship, shadowing, career fairs, lab rotations
2. Inventory and share tools that promote PHL careers. (1 vote)
3. What is already out there? Conduct an environmental scan and inventory the results. Are colleges already offering such promotional activities and if so, how do we ensure they add PHL as an option?
4. Create mentor training programs.
5. Expand the number of fellowship programs. Look at Wadsworth model¹. (16 votes)
 - a. Expand number of students in existing fellowship programs (e.g., EID)
6. Develop partnerships between PHLs and academic entities to provide research sites, access to samples, and in return negotiate access for PHL staff to take relevant courses for credit
7. Develop rotation plans for medical technology programs which focus on high impact projects; share tools for best practice.
8. Add a laboratory science track program to broader public health programs (e.g., PHAP program, EIS, PHPS, etc.)
9. Establish centralized location for job listings, especially entry level positions. (3 votes)
10. Use fellows, interns, students, as appropriate to participate in career awareness fairs and contribute to outreach events for the purpose of informing students about careers in PHL science
11. Develop model Knowledge, Skills, Abilities (KSAs) documents that relate to job functions within the PHL and share with human resources departments to use when recruiting for positions within the PHL

Performance Metrics

- Increase in fellowship programs (or fellows within existing programs?)

¹ The New York state public health laboratory — the Wadsworth Center — has leveraged the APHL-CDC sponsored Emerging Infectious Diseases Fellowship program by creating a parallel program and giving eligible and qualified candidates who were not selected for the EID fellowship program due to funding constraints, an opportunity to participate.

- Increase the number of partnerships with universities, especially guidance counselors, and science departments to share resources that promote careers in PHL science
- Increase the number of medical technology rotations in PHLs
- Centralized job listing that is in place and updated routinely
- Mentors are identified and used for expansion of activities
- Track the number of individuals that use resources and tools that promote PHL careers and monitor over time to see if there is an increase in the utility of the resources
- Track and monitor the number of fellowship program graduates placed in PHL positions

Focal Area 4: Maximize/leverage hiring and promotion rules and incentives

Proposed Activities:

1. Develop KSA's for human resource departments to assist in recruitment process
2. Advocate for aligned compensation and salary ranges across the country
3. Consider standardizing nomenclature of position titles to facilitate comparison of and alignment of position roles and responsibilities across the county
4. Develop career pathways for positions within PHLs
5. Integrate core competencies into position descriptions to support career steps
6. Integrate core competencies into development of training that supports upward mobility through career steps
7. Promote professional development activities as part of the performance management plan for each employee

Goal D: Strengthen systems and capacity to support the PHL workforce

Focal Area 1: Define the numbers and types of workers needed

Focal Area 2: Promote organizational culture that supports workforce development and recruitment

Proposed activities:

1. Capture success stories about promotions within the system and opportunities for advancements; share in *Lab Matters* and OSTLTS success story website
2. Start with PHL Directors and delegates and do presentation on value of a learning organization and begin to change culture
3. Collect samples of best and innovative practices for workforce development and recruitment
4. Propose new APHL award: "The Learning Laboratory"
5. Include assessment of individual learning styles in APHL activities like New Laboratory Director Orientation program, National Center for Public Health

Laboratory (NCPHLL) activities in support of leadership skill building, Emerging Infectious Diseases fellows, etc.

Focal Area 3: Increase sustainable funding models

The group recognized that this supporting strategy was so complex that it would require considerable resources beyond this group to address.

Focal Area 4: Target policy efforts and changes

The group discussed the need to conduct a thorough analysis of the current workforce and prepare projections on the future workforce needs. In order to do so, it will be necessary to characterize and profile the existing workforce in the field; collect data routinely to allow for monitoring of changes and trends in the workforce; conduct environmental scans and monitor trends in the field; and draw projections that estimate the workforce needs in the future. CDC and APHL will need to continue to support a robust research agenda to yield accurate intelligence to estimate needs.

Each strategy in support of Goal D is in support of strengthening the recruitment strategies to motivate individuals to consider careers in PHL science careers.

For Intent Statement 2: Provide PHL staff resources to ensure mobility within the PHL system.

Goal B: Increase capability of existing PHL workforce

Focal Area 1: Define target skills and competencies across disciplines

Focal Area 2: Expand training for all levels of the public health laboratory workforce including ongoing and just-in-time training

Proposed activities for both supporting strategies above:

1. Develop competency-based core curriculum
 - a. Scientific Core
 - b. Leadership and Management
 - c. Full range of laboratory positions (from entry level to director)
2. Inventory available training
3. Leverage existing training
4. Develop own on-line resource to share information
5. Learning on the job – applied learning without specific objectives

Performance Measures

- Any microbiology training developed by NLTN, APHL or CDC will be competency based. (The molecular biology training course is completed):
 - By 2014, development is started of laboratory safety/quality management competencies
 - By 2014, planning to develop core competencies for management and leadership
 - By 2015, core competencies for the curricula are available

Focal Area 5: Develop robust leader and leadership development offerings

The proposed activities described above are in support of developing effective and impactful retention strategies. These include: the implementation of workforce competencies that will facilitate the development of career pathways within the discipline; assistance in the development of appropriate position descriptions and performance management processes; and providing a foundation to build sound curriculum to assure that individuals are equipped with the capabilities required to perform their jobs.

Goal C: Improve pathways for PHL careers

Focal Area 3: Improve retention strategies for existing public health laboratory professionals

Proposed activities:

1. Create career path template to include:
 - a. Orientation and movement upward
 - b. Individual development plan
 - c. Mentors, both technical and peer, identified
 - d. Adoption of eLEET enrichment and other toolkits within CDC and APHL in a broader context
 - e. Feedback to employee
 - f. Foster an environment in which employee development is nurtured.
 - g. Promote the adoption of career tracks for positions within the PHL where advancements are based on competencies and a recommended timeframe
2. Define education requirements for each activity above
 - a. Explore options for financial support/loan forgiveness with service requirements
3. Assure basic competencies are aligned with job description and are met
4. Provide temporary reassignments to special project or other programs to enhance skill/knowledge base
 - a. Continuous Quality Improvement

5. Consider incentives such as
 - a. Flexible hours/days. (Will PHLs shift to 24-hour environments?)
 - b. Professional development funds
 - i. Conference fees
 - ii. Online training
 - iii. Books/journals
 - iv. Reimbursements for training events, resources, professional development enhancement, especially as related to maintenance of licensure, and professional organizational memberships
 - c. Seek sponsorship for professional development
 - d. Encourage participation in specialty association, committees, work groups
 - e. Provide Awards/Recognition of good work
 - i. Non-monetary
 - ii. Monetary
6. Communicate persuasively
 - a. Storytelling
 - b. Advocacy
 - c. Public service value

Focal Area 4: Modernize hiring and promotion rules and incentives

The group recognized that each state jurisdiction had specific rules and regulations regarding hiring, promotion and incentives. Further, this group has no control over these state-specific practices. This activity would require additional partners and resources that are outside the authority of the stakeholders represented at this planning meeting. More work is required here.

Goal D: Strengthen systems and capacity to support the PHL workforce

Focal Area 2: Promote organizational culture that supports workforce development

Proposed activities:

1. Capture success stories of promotion within system and opportunities in *Lab Matters*, E-Update, CDC OSTLTS (6 votes)
2. APHL Annual Meeting session on “Learning Organization” (3 votes)
3. Collect examples of best and innovative practices (1 vote)
4. Suggest new APHL Award for “Learning Laboratory” (11 votes)
5. Categories might include: mentors; trainer; trainee; innovative pedagogy

Innovations:

- Private-public partnerships (support annual meeting speaker, awards)

- Conduct PHL employee exit interviews and capture this information in a standard template so as to provide insight into strengths and challenges of organizational structure, environment, and practices
- Assess individual training style in APHL laboratory directors' orientation, NCPHLL, EID fellowship, etc.
- Capture stories with video, podcasts
- Because resources (staff, time and money) are limited, consider engaging high school and college students to participate in competitive activities and current PHL staff to develop materials (e.g., short videos, posters, slogans) that promote PHLs
- Enlist student interns from non-lab departments (e.g., marketing, health education, communications) to capture success stories
- Expand audience and partnerships beyond usual lab partners (e.g., ASTHO, ASPH, AMA, legislature, government human resources directors, non-lab program areas of CDC)

Performances Measures:

- # who access success stories
- Pre- and post-implementation assessment of how labs are using success stories
- # nominations for existing awards and establish awards/recognition programs specific to the PHL community nationwide
- Successes and challenges gleaned from exit interviews

Focal Area 3: Increase sustainable funding models

Proposed Activities:

1. Engage economists to help define and produce data on laboratory workload, staffing, productivity, cost effectiveness, and ROI
2. Develop and distribute APHL-sponsored course on program evaluation
3. Document gaps/needs
4. Measure effectiveness of laboratory "program/activities"
 - a. Satisfaction survey – market improvements after intervention
 - b. Retention rate
 - c. Number/percentage of STEM majors gaining PHL employment
 - d. Ratio of qualified applicants to vacancies
 - e. Evaluate training effectiveness and measure changes in laboratory practice
5. Marketing evaluation – penetration, how did you learn about us

Innovations:

- Assess individual training style in APHL laboratory directors' orientation, NCPHLL cohort program, EID fellowships, etc.
- Capture stories with video, pod-casts, interviews

- Use student interns from non-lab departments (e.g. marketing, health education and communications)
- Expand audience and partnerships beyond usual lab partners
- Partner with corporate sponsors/ foundations to access skills/capabilities
- Create virtual knowledge repository that is interactive; solicit reviews from users
- Develop webinar for SPHLs and stakeholders re: the repository and speakers' bureau

Additional Prioritizations

As summarized in this report, group consensus indicated that the priority issues that require significant action to move the PHL workforce strategy forward include the following goals:

- Recruitment: promoting career awareness and building the pipeline; and,
- Retention: strategies and incentives to motivate individuals to remain in PHL careers

Further, two focal areas in particular are critical for success in accomplishing the two goals above, specifically:

- Promoting an organizational culture that supports workforce development; and,
- Defining target skills and competencies across disciplines

In addition to the above, the group also made the following recommendations and suggestions for consideration in developing a strategic direction to recruit and retain the PHL workforce:

- Enumerate and characterize current PHL workforce regularly and track over time
- Forecast future workforce needs
- Explore various financial models to support goals and activities
- Target STEM majors, pre-STEM majors (e.g., computer technology majors, undeclared freshmen, associate degree holders, etc.), displaced workers and those reentering the workforce, and former military personnel with laboratory experience
- Strongly recommend focus on minority students.

D. Related Activities and Next Steps

This summary report from the May 2013 meeting has formed the basis for a four-page strategic plan for the PHL workforce. This four-page strategic plan will serve as a roadmap to guide collaborative partner efforts in advancing the capability and capacity of the public health laboratory workforce. Both will be distributed to the participants of the May 2013 meeting. In the spring 2014, a series of virtual meetings will be convened to review the documents, reaffirm the strategic intent, and solicit volunteers to participate in the implementation of the priority activities.

E. Appendix

Please refer to the appendix section that follows and includes the following items:

- List of common themes from the meeting
- List of key considerations
- List of developmental gaps identification
- Roster of planning meeting participants including the APHL member participants and staff and CDC principals.

Appendix

Outputs from the Meeting

I. Common Discussion Themes:

- Modernizing the PHL workforce
 - Inter-professional teams
- Develop a value proposition for all position levels
- New skill sets needed now and in the future
- Grow breadth/experience so that personnel have flexibility to move in many directions
- Define the needs and then find the resources
- Flexible career ladders
- Enhanced education system
- Define who are the decision makers
- Be aggressive around workforce
- Articulate importance of the PHL community
- How does workforce fit into the bigger, legislative topics? (must speak language of the “other side”)
- Do we have a “home”/umbrella for workforce initiatives? – need to coordinate
- Public health/private/clinical integration
- Advocacy focus and influence – we need to be clear
- Focus more on private funding for fellowships and show numbers and impact

II. Key Considerations

- Who to partner with? Clinical, environmental, food, federal agencies, other professional organizations (e.g., ASPH, ASTHO)?
- Who else is concerned about the PHL workforce?
- Where is the “home” for PHL leadership?
- Explore funding models
- Financial support for students is limited

III. Developmental Gaps Identified

- Masters and PhD/DrPH programs in PHL science are not available
 - Explore models
 - Research curriculum options
- While a Doctorate in Clinical Laboratory Science track exists, a specific doctoral track in PHL science does not. There is a need to define board certification requirements for both doctoral candidates in clinical laboratory science and in PHL science in a standard manner.
- Financial support for students is limited

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ⁱ ** Effective July 8, 2013, staff within the Laboratory Science, Policy and Practice Program Office (within the Office of Surveillance, Epidemiology and Laboratory Services) has transitioned to the Center for Surveillance, Epidemiology, and Laboratory Services [CSELS (proposed)] or the Division of Laboratory Programs, Standards, and Services (proposed) within CSELS.