

INDIAN HEALTH  
**RECRUITMENT TOOLKIT**

People  Smart  
*It's the People You Hire and Keep*

## Experiential Training

The IHS offers many educational opportunities. There are presently some 50 residencies that recurrently rotate residents through IHS. What's more, there is an active dental externship program as well as a pharmacy residency program at IHS. These types of programs need to exist for nurses who are required to have nursing experience before joining IHS. An educational program would not only attract new nurse recruits to IHS, but also give it a means to hire future nurses through a nursing residency program.

Developing this type of capacity or sustaining momentum will assist sites in identifying potential new long-term employees as well as create a learning environment for all who participate. An analysis of learning organizations, published in the *International Journal of Training and Development* by ET Welsh, et al., provides six important concepts to determine organizational proficiency and appeal within their respective learning environments.<sup>1</sup> The concepts the authors cited are:

- consistency
- improved delivery
- convenience
- decreased information overload
- quality initiatives
- improved costs



<sup>1</sup> Welsh, ET, Wanberg, CR, Brown, KG and Simmering, MJ (2003). E-learning: emerging uses, empirical results and future directions. 1, 7(4), 245-258.

- The Health Professions Scholarship Program (Section 104) provides support for AI/AN students from federally recognized Tribes (state-recognized Tribal members are not eligible) enrolled in health professions or allied health professions programs. Students incur a service obligation and payback requirement on acceptance of funding from this program. Priority is given to graduate students and junior- and senior-level students, unless otherwise specified.

Visit <http://www.scholarship.ihs.gov> for more information.

The IHS also funds a small number of students annually to attend the Uniformed Services University for the Health Sciences (USUHS). Known as the nation's federal health science university, USUHS offers a curriculum that helps health care professionals develop their skills for careers that serve their country. In exchange, recipients must fulfill a 10-year service obligation to IHS and the US Public Health Service. There are only a few IHS positions available each year. However, the USUHS trained physicians are mission driven, often become leaders at IHS and provide retention in the medical category of the Public Health Service.

Learn more at <http://www.usuhs.mil/>.



## IHS Loan Repayment Program

The IHS Loan Repayment Program (LRP) offers health care professionals the opportunity to ease qualified health professions-related student loan debts while helping Indian health programs meet the staffing needs of high priority sites. It is a great option for applicants willing to practice for at least two years at an Indian health program site in exchange for up to \$40,000 in loan repayment funding and up to an additional \$8,000 to offset the tax liability. Loan repayment recipients can extend their initial two-year contract annually and receive up to an additional \$20,000 per year, plus up to \$4,000 for taxes, until their original loan debt is paid. Primary care physicians, dentists, nurses, pharmacists, optometrists and many other health care professionals are eligible to apply for the IHS LRP.

Visit [www.loanrepayment.ihs.gov](http://www.loanrepayment.ihs.gov) for more information.

## Supplemental Loan Repayment Program

The IHS Supplemental Loan Repayment Program (SLRP) allows IHS facilities to fund loan repayment awards to fill specific vacancies at their locations, further helping to improve recruitment efforts. The reality is that the demand for LRP contracts consistently exceeds the capacity to award all program applicants. The SLRP has helped close the gap between the amount of funding authorized by Congress for loan repayment and the actual money needed for employee contracts.

The SLRP is more than just an incentive to health professions job candidates – it can also be a good investment for facilities with hard-to-fill vacancies, especially if those vacancies would normally generate third-party revenue. For example, if a facility goes six months without filling a physician position, they have six months of lapsed salary money. If that money is put toward guaranteed loan repayment, the facility gets a physician guaranteed for two years who, in that time, should bill more than that amount to Medicaid or insurance. That covers the guaranteed loan repayment and can, in fact, be a nice interest payment on the investment.

When you offer this program to your job candidates, the facility has a hiring edge and the employees are still eligible to qualify for regular IHS LRP awards.



## National Health Service Corps Programs

The National Health Service Corps (NHSC) offers scholarship and loan repayment programs to qualified applicants who agree to a service obligation at a qualified site. The NHSC helps the nation's Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSA) acquire the medical, dental and mental health providers they need by assisting them with scholarship and loan repayment programs.

The NHSC scholarship pays tuition, required fees and certain additional education costs tax free for up to four years. Examples of the types of covered education costs may include books, clinical supplies, laboratory expenses, instruments, two sets of uniforms and travel for one clinical rotation. Scholarship recipients also receive a monthly living stipend (\$1,269 in 2009 – 2010). The stipend is taxable. Upon graduation, participants may serve from two to four years as primary care providers in a community-based site in an approved, high-need HPSA.

Participants in the NHSC loan repayment program can receive financial assistance to repay their student loans in exchange for a service commitment as primary care providers in an approved HPSA. Up to \$145,000 is available in NHSC loan repayment for qualifying clinicians choosing a five-year commitment to the NHSC. Two-year service awards for \$50,000 are also available. After completing their service obligation, participants may apply for additional years of support.

Your site may be eligible to receive NHSC financial incentives to help recruit health care professionals. The NHSC requires a Recruitment and Retention Assistance application for all clinical practice sites seeking NHSC funding.

To be eligible to apply, your site must meet the following criteria:

- Reside in a Health Professionals Shortage Area
- Provide services on a discount fee schedule
- Accept patients covered by Medicare, Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program
- Maintain sound fiscal management and provide a competitive salary, benefits and malpractice coverage package for clinicians

Visit <http://nhsc.bhpr.hrsa.gov/> for more information and to apply.

*Note: Participants cannot receive IHS and NHSC funding simultaneously.*



## Health Resources and Service Administration (HRSA) State Loan Repayment Programs

The HRSA State Loan Repayment Programs are other recruitment incentives to offer potential employees. Similar to the NHSC program, the HRSA state loan repayment program provides matching funds to more than 30 states to operate their own loan repayment programs for primary care clinicians working in Health Professional Shortage Areas. Eligibility requirements and benefits vary – visit the NHSC Web site to see if your site is eligible to participate and to review the requirements and benefits.

Visit <http://nhsc.hrsa.gov/loanrepayment/state.htm> for more information.



In a 1990 article published in the *Australian Journal of Rural Health*, authors Veitch, Harte, Hays and Pashen, et al. describe the impact of community participation in the recruitment of physicians in hard to fill rural areas with constant physician turnover. The authors outline a method for rejuvenating recruitment in four stages: rapid participatory appraisal; thematic grouping of issues; open community meetings; and subsequent meetings with the community.<sup>2</sup>

These four stages were utilized in the development of a community action plan for physician recruiting. Some common strategies among the communities utilizing the methods were:

- Forming a liaison committee to interface with other stakeholders
- Developing information packages for prospective applicants
- Forming a welcome process that helps doctors and families settle in
- Addressing quality and appropriateness of housing
- Sponsoring a medical student to spend time in the community
- Considering spouses' education and employment needs

The authors discovered that communities are able to play an important role in the recruiting of physicians. Communication between prospective health care providers and the community can be a crucial factor in rural communities to identify and retain primary care service providers. It may help to educate your candidates beforehand about the community they would be working in to ensure that it will be a good match.



## Personnel Systems (Federal, Commissioned Corps, Tribal)

A unique aspect of an IHS career is that candidates can match their professional and personal priorities to one of three Indian health systems career paths. This can be an especially effective recruiting tool when you can show the choices available at IHS compared with private-sector health care settings.

The IHS offers three different personnel systems, each of which offers unique career rewards, competitive compensation based on training and experience, a comprehensive benefits package and specific eligibility requirements. The following brief descriptions of each personnel system can be used in your recruiting efforts.

**Federal Civil Service:** This personnel system can be attractive to job candidates who are interested in generous federal employee benefits and to those with a history of federal employment. This entry path offers career flexibility without multi-year contractual commitments and, because there are no age or physical requirements, it's open to experienced professionals and recent graduates alike.

**US Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps:**

Job candidates who express an interest in a long-term career with eligibility for full retirement after only 20 years will be interested in learning about the Commissioned Corps. Be sure to tell job candidates that more than 35 percent of USPHS Commissioned Corps officers work for IHS and receive benefits similar to those provided by the US military services, including a generous vacation package and comprehensive health care benefits.

**Direct Tribal Hire:** Working directly for a Tribe is a unique opportunity that some job candidates will find appealing, particularly those who want to make a difference to a community in need and are inspired by purpose and a sense of mission. Be sure to explain that candidates can accept employment directly with one of the more than 560 federally recognized Tribes throughout 35 US states. American Indian and Alaska Native job candidates are especially suited to this career path. Employment benefits vary depending on the Tribe and the position, but are comparable to those offered by federal personnel systems. Candidates should know that IHS can help them find a position with a Tribal health program, but the candidates must negotiate pay and benefits directly with the Tribe.



<sup>1</sup>Zurn P, Dal Poz M, Stilwell B, Adams O (2004). Imbalance in the health workforce. Hum Resour Health 2004; 2:13 doi: 10.1186/1478-4491-2-13 pmid: 15377382.

<sup>2</sup>Veitch, C, Harte, J, Hays, R, Pashen, D, Clark, S. and Professor, A. (1999). Community participation in the recruitment and retention of rural doctors: methodological and logistical considerations. Australian Journal of Rural Health; 7(4): 206-211.

- **Print Advertising Campaign** – The IHS provides an assortment of full-color print ads that feature images and content highlighting the look and feel of an IHS career. The campaign theme “Our Idea Of ...” illustrates the differences between an IHS career and working in a traditional health care setting. For example, *Our Idea of Watching the Clock* juxtaposes the notion of being in a job where one watches the clock (waiting for quitting time) with a career at IHS depicted by an IHS health care professional and his or her family members shown enjoying a picturesque sunset amidst the great outdoors. Available in a variety of formats, these ads are appropriate for trade publications and can be used as flyers and posters at group recruiting events.
- **PHP Careers Web Site** – Individuals interested in IHS careers can visit the IHS Careers site <[www.careers.ihs.gov](http://www.careers.ihs.gov)> or the IHS Jobs Vacancies Database <[www.ihs.gov/jobscareerdevelop/careercenter/vacancy](http://www.ihs.gov/jobscareerdevelop/careercenter/vacancy)> to view current job openings, benefits and more.



## Making Social Media Work for You

You can expand the reach of your recruitment efforts and connect with a wide range of future health care career candidates through online social media sites such as LinkedIn, Facebook, MySpace and YouTube. As a career networking resource, the use of social media sites has rapidly taken off. Users can instantly connect with a large number of individuals who share common interests to learn about job opportunities and share networking information as well as communicate. You can take advantage of this powerful tool by creating your own recruitment pages, groups and discussion boards to connect with more potential job candidates, increase the visibility of your opportunities and promote your facility and the benefits of working for IHS.

You can also use online social media sites to benefit your own professional development as a health care professions recruiter. Join health care and employee recruitment groups to network with other health care recruiters, participate in discussions of recruitment best practices, promote your job openings and more.

## Tribal Involvement

Enhance your recruiting efforts by asking Tribal leaders to participate in the recruitment process. Tribal leaders can bring the unique cultural aspect of working at IHS to life and make the career experience that much more vivid for those considering a position. Job candidates get a direct and personalized account of rich Tribal culture and what it is like to work in a health care organization that is unique in the patient population it serves. Consider approaching Tribal officials to organize field trips, group discussions and other Tribal-led “meet-and-greet” opportunities to provide candidates with a better understanding of a career with IHS. It can have a positive impact on your recruiting efforts.



