



# Indian Health Service Recruitment Toolkit

*A collection of recruitment strategies  
to ensure your organization attracts  
the most promising candidates.*





## Recruitment Tips and Tactics

Section 1: Educational Resources and Student Opportunities

Section 2: Loan Repayment Opportunities

Section 3: Cultural Transitions

Section 4: Marketing Materials

We hope you find the information contained within the following sections helpful in your efforts to recruit the most qualified, motivated and talented health care professionals and clinical staff available.

This Recruitment Toolkit contains tips and tactics focused on five specific recruitment issues: Educational resources; policy/legislative programs and opportunities; financial considerations; working and living in Indian communities; and making the best use of marketing. Use and share these strategies throughout your organization to build a successful staff and collegial working environment.

# Section 1: Educational Resources

## Local Educational Support

Continuing education is important to employees retention and, therefore, to attracting job candidates as well. In a recent Indian health survey, three of the top four successful strategies for retaining employees were educational interventions, whether through off-site or on-site training, webinars or other continuing medical education (CME training).

When recruiting health care professionals, it's beneficial to place an emphasis on staff training and education. Educational support demonstrates a commitment to building a strong recruitment- and retention-focused working environment.

## Experiential Training

An Indian health career offers numerous educational opportunities, including health profession scholarships, externships and residency rotations throughout the Indian health system. Continuing educational programs not only attract new recruits to the Indian health system, but also provide a means to retain valuable professional staff. For example, there are a number of graduate and pre-graduate programs, as well as externships available to those seeking an Indian health nursing career, including the IHS Scholarship Program; the American Indians into Nursing Program, and the Health Resources Services Administration's (HRSA) NURSE CORPS program. Residency rotations done in partnership with IHS are beneficial for nurses who may be required to have experience before joining the Indian health system, as well as to encourage and prepare them for the rigors of practicing in rural Indian Health care facilities.

Regardless of discipline, 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.\* The concepts the authors cited are:

- Consistency.
- Improved delivery.
- Convenience.
- Decreased information overload.
- Quality initiatives.
- Improved costs.

\*Welsh, ET, Wanberg, CR, Brown, KG and Simmering, MJ (2003). *E-learning: Emerging uses, empirical results and future directions. International Journal of Training and Development*, 7(4), 245-258.

## IHS Scholarship Programs

Scholarship resources can be effective incentives in your recruiting efforts. The availability of this funding provides opportunities for many students and health care professionals who might otherwise be unable to afford the cost of a health care professional education. Connecting with potential candidates to discuss financial resources for their qualified education will help you gain a better understanding of their career expectations, what type of workplace appeals to them and how they would fit in with your organization or team.



## IHS Scholarships

The IHS Scholarship Program provides financial assistance for American Indian/Alaska Native undergraduates and graduates to enroll in a variety of degree programs leading to a health profession career. As a recruitment tool, the Scholarship program grows the pool of potential American Indian and Alaska Native health care professionals and grooms future IHS clinical leadership. For more information about the three IHS scholarships (listed below), visit [www.ihs.gov/scholarship](http://www.ihs.gov/scholarship).

- *The Preparatory Scholarship* provides financial assistance (including tuition, fees and living expenses) for members and descendants of qualified federally or state-recognized Tribes enrolled in compensatory or preparatory courses leading to entry into health professional schools, including nursing, pharmacy, physician assistant, physical therapy and others as needed by Indian health programs.
- *The Pre-Graduate Scholarship* provides financial support for members and descendants of federally or state-recognized Tribes enrolled in courses leading to a bachelor's degree in specific pre-professional areas, which will allow for application to a postgraduate health professions program, such as medicine, dentistry, podiatry, optometry and others as needed by Indian health programs.
- *The Health Professions Scholarship* provides support for American Indian/Alaska Native students from members of federally recognized Tribes who are enrolled in approved health professions or health professions education programs. Students agree to a service commitment 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.

## National Health Service Corps (NHSC) Scholarship Program

The NHSC offers scholarships to qualified applicants who agree to a service commitment at a qualified site. The NHSC helps facilities fill vacancies within the Primary Care, Dental and Mental Health fields, known as Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs), 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. Scholarship recipients also receive a taxable monthly living stipend. Upon graduation and completion of training, participants serve from two to four years as primary care providers in a community-based site in an approved, high-need HPSA.

## The Health Resources and Service Administration (HRSA) NURSE CORPS Scholarship Program

The HRSA NURSE CORPS Scholarship Program, formerly known as the Nursing Scholarship Program has been helping health care facilities with critical shortages of nurses meet their needs since 1992. A Critical Shortage Facility is a health care facility located in, designated as or serving a primary medical care or mental health HPSA.

The NURSE CORPS Scholarship program is available to full-time nursing students in health degree programs in exchange for a service commitment in critical shortage areas. For more information, visit the [HRSA NURSE CORPS website](#).

## Section 2: Loan Repayment Opportunities

### The IHS Loan Repayment Program (LRP)

The IHS Loan Repayment Program (LRP) offers health care professionals the opportunity to ease qualified education loans leading to a degree in a health profession discipline while helping Indian health programs meet the staffing needs of priority sites. It is a great option for applicants willing to commit to full-time clinical 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 participants 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 the [IHS LRP website](#) for more information.

### IHS Supplemental Loan Repayment Program

The 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.

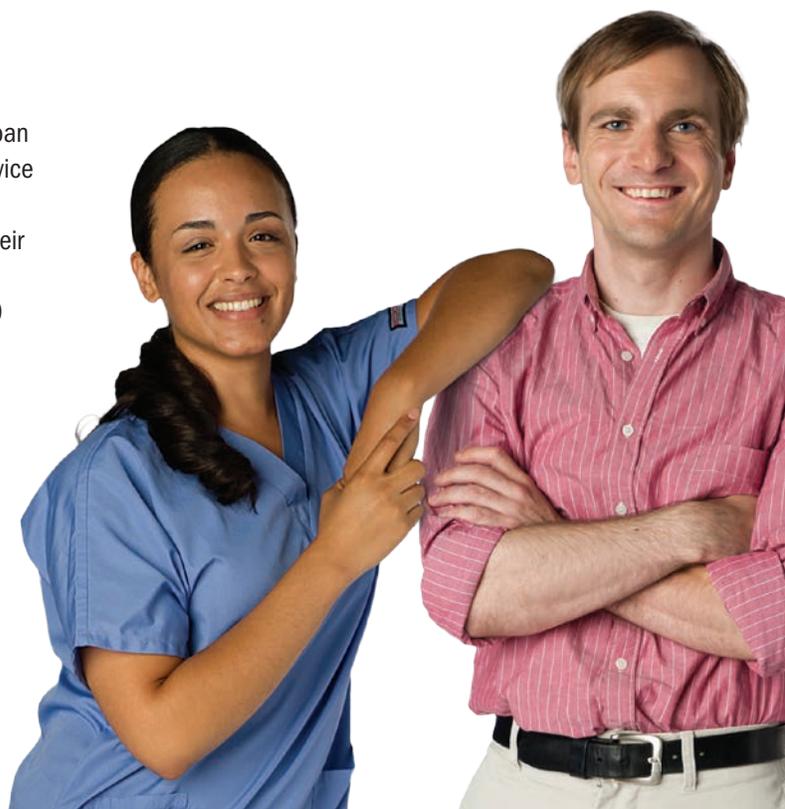
The SLRP is more than just an incentive to health professions job candidates — it can also be a good investment for facilities with hard-to-fill vacancies, especially if those vacancies would normally generate third-party revenue. For example, if a facility goes six months without filling a physician 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 (NHSC) Loan Repayment Program

In addition to scholarship opportunities, the NHSC also offers loan repayment programs to qualified applicants who agree to a service commitment at a qualified site. 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. NHSC pays up to \$60,000 (tax free) in loan repayment funding for a two-year service commitment. After completing their service commitment, participants may annually apply for additional years of support. Visit the [NHSC website](#) for more information.

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



## The Health Resources and Service Administration (HRSA) NURSE CORPS Loan Repayment Program

And, like the NHSC, HRSA offers the HRSA NURSE CORPS Loan Repayment Program, formerly known as the Nursing Education Loan Repayment Program. The NURSE CORPS funds up to 60 percent of qualified health education loans for registered nurses and advanced practice nurses who agree to a two-year service commitment. Visit the [HRSA NURSE CORPS LRP website](#).

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

HRSA's State Loan Repayment Programs are other recruitment incentives to offer potential employees. Similar to the NHSC program, the HRSA state program provides matching funds to more than 30 states to operate their own loan repayment programs for primary care clinicians working in HPSAs. Eligibility requirements and benefits vary. Visit the [HRSA website](#) to see if your site is eligible to participate and to review the requirements and benefits by state.

The best way to attract top candidates with the right credentials to your openings within Indian health communities is to offer continuing education and training program opportunities. Chief executive officers (CEOs), clinical directors and nurse executives who develop educational initiatives within their facilities can assist their professional staff in satisfying licensing requirements and reduce professional isolation, both of which can keep recruitment efforts in top form. Additionally, continuing education and training can positively impact the accessibility and quality of care in the communities served.



## Section 3: Cultural Transitions

### Within Indian Health Communities

#### Identifying the Right Candidate for the Right Job and Location

An Indian health career is a unique and fulfilling vocation – talented health care professionals dedicate their careers to providing health care to medically underserved American Indian and Alaska Native people, often located in rural and remote communities. Many of our clinicians find their work both professionally and personally fulfilling by giving back to the community and practicing among appreciative and deserving patients. By promoting the personal and professional rewards of an Indian health career to prospective applicants, you are more likely to find a candidate who seeks the growth, cultural stimulation and advancement an IHS career has to offer.

When you match the right person to the right community and your site, you increase your chances of a successful hire and years of successful retention. Since Indian health facilities are mainly located in remote, rural areas, it is important to set honest expectations for your work location and environment. Working in a remote facility may be foreign to many candidates, but if educated upfront about the lifestyle, community, cultural aspects and local services, many will enjoy the work and lifestyle that an Indian health career has to offer. Discussing these aspects of an Indian health career with job candidates in an open and in-depth way can help you distinguish between those who thrive in such environments and those who might not find it to their liking. It is an investment that is well worth the time.

*Coming soon:* Successful Transitions series of urban to rural transition guidelines to be available as a brochure, workbook and PowerPoint Presentation (PPT).

In addition, be sure to stress the rewarding opportunities for cultural awareness, including learning about and being a part of a rich heritage; enjoying an adventurous lifestyle where opportunities for hiking, skiing, fishing, hunting and other outdoor pursuits are right at your doorstep; and building professional growth working within a patient-centered team environment, all the while serving a unique patient population in some of the most picturesque areas of the country.

#### Rural Health Care Recruiting

In addition to providing a good fit with a specific team and facility, your goal is to ensure that people who come to work in Indian health are well matched for the community and the lifestyle.

Be sure to stress to the candidate that there are several key steps he or she should take before choosing to practice within a rural Indian community. This will ensure a successful long-term match:

- Understand and appreciate the work and lifestyle a rural health career offers before signing on.
- Learn about basic lifestyle options, such as housing, banking, shopping, conveniences, cost-of-living considerations, utilities and others.
- Meet with potential supervisors, colleagues and Tribal representatives at facilities you are considering.
- Learn about the personality of the facility and the types of people for whom you would care and work alongside.
- Visit the community to get a feel for its people, their heritage and traditions and gauge your comfort level to determine how you might fit in.

For additional reference on urban to rural relocation, see *Moving to a Small Town: A Guidebook for Moving from Urban to Rural America*, Urbanska and Levering, Simon & Schuster, 1996.

## Personnel Systems – Federal Civil Service, Direct Tribal/Urban Indian Hire and the USPHS Commissioned Corps

The Indian health care system offers three career paths, 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. For complete information on the eligibility requirements and benefits of each system, visit the IHS Careers page.

**Federal Civil Service:** This personnel system can be attractive to job candidates who are interested in 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.

**Direct Tribal/Urban Indian Hire:** Working directly for one of the more than 560 federally recognized Tribes throughout the United States offers clinicians the same opportunities to make a difference and serve a medically underserved patient population. With the passage of Title V, "Health Services for Urban Indians," of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act in 1976 [Public Law (P.L.) 94-437], landmark legislation was enacted to improve the health and well-being of all American Indian and Alaska Natives (AI/AN), including those who live in urban areas. AI/AN job candidates are especially suited to Tribal/Urban Indian health careers. By providing quality health services and outreach and referral programs, they fill a void among urban AI/AN communities in need of these services. Amendments to Title V have strengthened these programs to expand direct medical services, alcohol services, mental health services, AIDS services and health promotion and disease prevention services.

Tribal/Urban Indian hire employment benefits vary depending on the location 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/Urban health program, but the candidates must negotiate pay and benefits directly with the program.

**US Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps:** Job candidates who express an interest in a long-term career with eligibility for 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 are assigned to Indian health programs and receive the same salary and benefits to those provided by the US uniformed services, including a generous vacation package and comprehensive health care benefits.

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 the country. In exchange, recipients must fulfill a 10-year service commitment to the Indian Health Service and the USPHS. There are only a few IHS positions available each year. However, the USUHS trained physicians are mission driven and often become leaders within IHS and directly and indirectly provide retention in the medical category of the USPHS.



# Section 4: Marketing Materials

## Marketing Indian Health Careers

### Marketing Materials

#### *Resources Available and How to Use Them*

The Indian Health Service (IHS) has developed a new health professions recruitment message to promote the unique opportunity its clinicians experience while practicing patient-centered care as part of an interdisciplinary team of providers within both IHS sites and Tribal health facilities.

The new messaging describes how uniquely fulfilling an IHS career can be, both personally and professionally. Not only do our clinicians experience the rewards of serving a medically underserved, yet appreciative patient population, they also have an opportunity to practice in some of the most scenic areas of the continental United States.

The overall recruitment message is carried across recruitment/retention (REC), scholarship (SCH) and loan repayment (LRP) programs, yet each is individualized to emphasize its key benefits while promoting the Indian Health Service mission: To raise the physical, mental, social and spiritual health of American Indians and Alaska Natives to the highest level.

While this approach embodies the essence of an Indian health career, it also focuses on how to find the right facility and community within which to practice – an essential aspect of working in IHS and Urban Indian/Tribal health communities.

The following resources were developed to support the Indian Health Service campaign. Visit our online [marketing communications fulfillment site](#) to review and order materials.

- **Recruitment Kit Pocket Folder:** This multi-component, pocket-folder brochure includes informational, health care discipline-specific slipsheets, a Welcome Letter and all of the information you need to provide potential candidates with an overview of Indian health care professions, career path options and benefits, LRP and Scholarship programs and the IHS mission.
- **Advertising Campaign:** Ads promoting IHS programs are available in quarter-, half- and full-page print ads, as well as online banner ads appearing on websites where qualified health professionals are known to look for career information. In addition, targeted email headers to promote the LRP, SCH and REC (including rural health professionals and residents) were developed based on the Indian Health Service message. The advertising messages and images are available in a variety of sizes and formats, including new trade show booths and virtual event visuals.
- **Career Opportunities Website:** The campaign includes a new engaging, high-impact website that parallels most innovative government sites out there presently. The site communicates the IHS mission through eye-catching graphics, attention-getting messages and pertinent content necessary to encourage candidates to apply for employment, learn more about or take advantage of other Indian health programs available. The site is well planned to allow a more streamlined experience for candidates, including one-click access to apply for a job and loan repayment, as well as increased exposure for all health professions DHPS supports. The result is a comprehensive site that serves as the foundation for future recruitment and retention efforts (social media, mobile apps, etc.) in addition to optimizing the tracking of vital metrics.

Individuals interested in an Indian health career should visit [www.ihs.gov/careeropps](http://www.ihs.gov/careeropps) or contact a recruiter at [IHSrecruiters@ihs.gov](mailto:IHSrecruiters@ihs.gov).

## Making Social Media Work for You

Key to any recruitment campaign, networking the Indian Health message through social media sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and others will allow prospective job candidates, as well as current applicants and present clinicians to research IHS; stay abreast of its programs, deadlines and requirements; and share information among users. You can take advantage of this powerful tool by creating Area- or site-specific 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 an Indian health career.

You can also use online social media sites to benefit your own professional development as a health 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 encouraging Tribal community leaders to participate in the recruitment process. Tribal leaders can bring the unique cultural aspect of practicing in an Indian community to life and make the career experience that much more vivid for those considering a position. Health professional job candidates get a direct and personalized account of the rich Tribal culture and heritage, while learning how to successfully transition from an urban to rural environment or vice versa. Consider approaching Tribal officials to organize field trips, virtual group discussions and other Tribal-led “meet-and-greet” opportunities to provide candidates with a better understanding of an Indian health career.



Indian Health Service | Health Professions Support | [IHSRecruiters@ihs.gov](mailto:IHSRecruiters@ihs.gov) | [www.ihs.gov/retention](http://www.ihs.gov/retention)  
801 Thompson Ave., TMP Suite 450A | Rockville, MD 20852 | Phone: (301) 443-4242

The policy of the IHS is to provide absolute preference to qualified Indian applicants and employees who are suitable for federal employment in filling vacancies within the IHS. IHS is an equal opportunity employer.

