

Recruiting a Range of Student Interns, Inclusively and Legally

Internships are not just a learning opportunity for students; they're a chance for organizations to invest in the next generation of public health professionals while building a more inclusive workforce. As a preceptor, you can play a key role in this process by following intentional, fair, and inclusive recruitment and selection practices.

Core Principles

- Welcoming students from different races, ethnicities, socioeconomic backgrounds, sexual orientations, gender identities, immigration statuses, and disability experiences enriches public health work.
- Recruitment processes should be designed to reach and equitably support a broad range of candidates.
- Equity and compliance go hand in hand: It's possible and necessary to expand access while also following federal, state, and institutional nondiscrimination laws.

What You CAN Do to Support Diverse Recruitment

1. Write Inclusive, Accessible Internship Postings

- Use clear, welcoming language that avoids jargon.
- Highlight your organization's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Avoid unnecessary qualifications (e.g., "must have a car") that may create unintentional barriers.
- Include inclusive statements like: "We strongly encourage applications from students from underrepresented backgrounds and communities."
- Sample Language for Internship Descriptions: "Our organization values a diverse and inclusive workforce and seeks to support the development of future public health professionals from all backgrounds. We encourage students of all races, ethnicities, nationalities, gender identities, sexual orientations, disability statuses, and life experiences to apply."

2. Broaden Your Outreach

- Share postings with:
 - Minority-serving institutions (HBCUs, HSIs, Tribal Colleges)
 - Public health student associations (e.g., SOPHE, APHA's Student Assembly)
 - Campus offices that support first-gen, international, LGBTQ+, and disabled students
- Ask university partners or faculty to share with students from varied backgrounds

3. Use Fair and Consistent Selection Criteria

- Focus on skills, experiences, and potential, not just GPA or previous internships (which often favor students with more resources).
- Use a standardized rubric to evaluate applications to reduce bias.
- Avoid informal “fit” judgments that may reflect unconscious bias.
- Consider qualities like lived experience, community involvement, and language skills—not just formal education or work history.
- Tips for an Equitable Interview Process
 - Use a diverse interview panel if possible
 - Ask structured, consistent questions
 - Focus on behavioral and situational questions (e.g., “Tell us about a time you worked with a community different from your own”)
 - Provide interview questions in advance to reduce performance anxiety and level the playing field
 - Allow virtual interviews as an option

4. Be Open to Different Backgrounds and Pathways

- Welcome students from non-traditional paths—e.g., career changers, parents, international students, or those attending community colleges.
- Be flexible with scheduling or remote options when possible to accommodate students with outside responsibilities such as family obligations.

5. Long-Term Strategies for Inclusive Intern Recruitment

- Track the demographics of applicants and interns (anonymously) to identify gaps.
 - Keep these statistics hidden from people who are making hiring decisions, as they may unconsciously be swayed by this information. Demographic information may only be used in aggregate to identify whether job postings are reaching your intended audiences.
- Build long-term partnerships with schools and organizations that serve underrepresented students.

What You Should AVOID (Per Discrimination Laws)

Federal and state laws prohibit discrimination in hiring based on:

- Race, color, national origin
- Sex, gender identity, sexual orientation
- Religion

- Disability
- Age
- Immigration status (in some contexts)
- Genetic information

You cannot ask for any of the following during an interview or use it as part of your hiring decision. You may only collect demographic info in aggregate.

- A student's citizenship or visa status (unless relevant for hiring paperwork and after an offer is made)
- Health conditions or disabilities
- Family status, religion, or personal identity