



A Digital Recruitment and Retention Guide

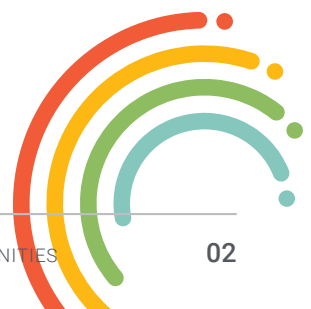
for Public Health Officials

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The opinions, conclusions, or recommendations of this digital guide for hiring officials are solely those of the National Hispanic Health Foundation and do not constitute or represent the official position of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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I. Introduction



Unique experiences are a strategic imperative for organizations and a competitive advantage in public health. A supportive workforce brings together a rich tapestry of perspectives and experiences, fostering innovation, social awareness, and fair healthcare access.

By embracing unique experiences, public health organizations can better understand and address the distinct needs of all populations, fostering trusting relationships, improving patient outcomes, enhancing employee satisfaction, and augmenting problem-solving capabilities.

A distinct workforce is not only a public health well-being obligation but also a practical necessity for delivering effective and equitable public health services.¹

¹ Rotenstein LS, Reede JY, Jena AB. Addressing Workforce Diversity: A Quality Improvement Framework. N Engl J Med. 2021 Mar 25;384(12):1083–1086. doi: 10.1056/NEJMp2032224.



II. Purpose:

This digital guide will equip hiring officials and managers with practical strategies to foster organizational adaptability. By implementing these strategies, organizations can ensure their workforce reflects the service delivery of their communities, thereby enhancing organizational effectiveness and promoting increased access to healthcare for all populations.

III. Understanding the Landscape:

Significant discrepancies persist in public health leadership and workforce representation despite some progress. These ongoing discrepancies are not just statistics, but a pressing call to action, underscoring the urgent need for targeted, fair initiatives to ensure representation in all public health settings.

Demographics:

A comprehensive understanding of diminished demographics is essential for effectively tailoring recruitment efforts to reach less-resourced groups. Analyzing demographic data allows organizations to identify specific needs and challenges these populations face, facilitating more targeted and effective recruitment strategies.

The Role of Adaptability:

Adaptable teams bring unique perspectives and experiences, which are crucial for addressing complex public health challenges. Variation in the workforce enhances social awareness in care, ensuring that healthcare services are tailored to the needs of all populations.²

² Nurse workforce diversity and reduced risk of severe adverse maternal outcomes: Am J Obstet Gynecol MFM. 2022 Sep;4(5):100689. doi: [PubMed] [Google Scholar] [10.1016/j.ajogmf.2022.09.10.1011]; Kutalek R. Diversity competence in medicine: equity, culture and practice. Cent Eur J Med. 2012;124: 3–9.

IV. Building Candidate Pipeline:



The following section discusses target identification, which involves collaborating with community leaders and organizations to understand the unique needs and aspirations of less-resourced populations. Outreach strategies include leveraging partnerships with community-serving institutions, attending cultural events, and utilizing social media platforms to engage with diverse candidates. Community partnerships focus on building trust with organizations and leaders to understand local needs and cultural nuances, while also highlighting the importance of creating a welcoming environment.

Target Identification:

Collaborating with community leaders and organizations is vital for identifying populations with limited access and understanding their unique needs and aspirations. These partnerships provide valuable insights into the community/population challenges and opportunities.³

Public Partnerships:

Building trust with supportive organizations and leaders is essential for understanding local needs and social nuances. These partnerships foster meaningful connections and enhance the credibility of recruitment efforts across all Populations.⁶

Outreach Strategies:

Effective outreach strategies involve leveraging partnerships with community-serving institutions, attending social events, and utilizing social media platforms to engage with a broad pool of candidates. These efforts help broaden the reach of recruitment initiatives.⁴

Comprehensive/Multifaceted Employer Branding:

Highlighting adaptable initiatives and creating a welcoming environment through welcoming language in communications and recruitment materials is crucial. A supportive employer brand demonstrates commitment to fairness and attracts candidates who value and support these principles.⁵

3 Tobias B, Glazer G, Mentzel T. An Academic-Community Partnership to Improve Health Care Workforce Diversity in Greater Cincinnati: Lessons Learned. *Prog Community Health Partnersh*. 2018;12(4):409-418. doi: 10.1353/cpr.2018.0066. PMID: 30739895

4 Blenner SR, Roth SE, Manukyan R, et al. Community Partnerships and Experiential Learning: Investing in the Next Generation of a Diverse, Qualified Public Health Workforce. *Pedagogy in Health Promotion*. 2021;7(1_suppl):51S-62S. doi:10.1177/23733799211046974

5 Lansing, A.E., Romero, N.J., Siantz, E. et al. Building trust: Leadership reflections on community empowerment and engagement in a large urban initiative. *BMC Public Health* 23, 1252 (2023) <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-023-15860-z>. Blenner SR, Roth SE, Manukyan R, et al. Community Partnerships and Experiential Learning: Investing in the Next Generation of a Diverse, Qualified Public Health Workforce. *Pedagogy in Health Promotion*. 2021;7(1_suppl):51S-62S. doi:10.1177/23733799211046974

6 Santana S, Pérez-Rico C. Dynamics of organizational climate and job satisfaction in healthcare service practice and research: a protocol for a systematic review. *Front Psychol*. 2023 Jul 13; 14:1186567. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1186567. PMID: 37519364; PMCID: PMC10374222).

V. Creating Clear and Welcoming Job Postings:



Crafting positive job postings is essential for creating a supportive and welcoming workplace. By emphasizing skills and qualifications, avoiding subjective language, and highlighting fair initiatives, organizations can attract a broader pool of talented candidates and foster a more supportive environment. The following elements provide practical recommendations for crafting positive job descriptions that promote positive environments.

Comprehensive Descriptions:

Crafting job descriptions that emphasize skills and qualifications is essential for attracting candidates from unique backgrounds. Avoiding limited language ensures that the job postings are welcoming to all potential applicants, thus broadening the candidate pool and fostering.⁷

Highlighting Variation:

Incorporating statements about variation and adaptable efforts within the organization signals a strong commitment to fairness. Highlighting these initiatives can attract candidates who value acceptance and want to join an organization that prioritizes variation.⁸

Avoidance Assumptions:

Eliminating subjective language and requirements that may exclude certain groups is crucial for ensuring fairness in the hiring process. Organizations can be fair and adaptable by focusing on objective criteria, making the application process more attainable to all candidates.⁹

Multimedia Utilization:

Videos, employee testimonials, and other multimedia formats can provide unique candidates with a deeper understanding of the organizational social values. These tools help convey a welcoming environment and demonstrate the organization's commitment to fairness.¹⁰

7 Rosales, R., León, I.A. & León-Fuentes, A.L. Recommendations for Recruitment and Retention of a Diverse Workforce: A Report from the Field. *Behav Analysis Practice* 16, 346–361 (2023). 10 Hewstone M, Rubin M, Willis H. Intergroup bias. *An Rev Psych.* 2002; 53: 575–604. doi: 10.1146/annurev.psych.53.100901.135109

8 Hewstone M, Rubin M, Willis H. Intergroup bias. *An Rev Psych.* 2002; 53: 575–604. doi: 10.1146/annurev. Psych.53.100901.135109

9 Carnes M, Fine E, Sheridan J. Promises and Pitfalls of Diversity Statements: Proceed with Caution. *Acad Med.* 2019 Jan;94(1):20-24. doi: 10.1097/ACM.0000000000002388. PMID: 30067539; PMCID: PMC6309930).

10 Rosales R, León IA, León-Fuentes AL. Recommendations for Recruitment and Retention of a Diverse Workforce: A Report from the Field. *Behav Anal Pract.* 2022 Sep 30;16(1):346-361. doi: 10.1007/s40617-022-00747-z. PMID: 36212634; PMCID: PMC9524305).

VI. Screening and Interviewing:



Effective screening and interviewing are crucial for selecting the best candidates and ensuring a fair and accepting hiring process. Implementing the following strategies can help mitigate variation and ensure impartial evaluation, enabling organizations to create a more inclusive and welcoming workplace.

Adaptable, Varied Panels:

Learn how to create interview panels that represent **different perspectives** to mitigate subjective opinions and promote fairness in the evaluation process. Unique panels can offer diverse perspectives, thereby enhancing the overall evaluation of candidates.¹¹

Structured Techniques:

Implement structured interview questions and standardized evaluation criteria to help reduce subjective opinions and ensure a fair hiring process. This approach fosters consistency and objectivity, resulting in more equitable outcomes.¹²

Social Training:

Interviewers should be trained on social cues, which are crucial for fair candidate assessment. Such training helps interviewers recognize and mitigate their biases and subjective opinions, ensuring a more thorough hiring process.¹³

Objective and Comprehensive Assessments:

Learn how to use objective assessment methods to measure candidates' skills and competencies, reducing subjective opinions. This ensures all candidates are evaluated fairly based on their abilities and qualifications.¹⁴

11 Rosales R, León IA, León-Fuentes AL. Recommendations for Recruitment and Retention of a Diverse Workforce: A Report from the Field. *BehavAnal Pract.* 2022 Sep 30;16(1):346-361. doi: 10.1007/s40617-022- 00747-z. PMID: 36212634; PMCID: PMC9524305

12 Bergelson I, Tracy C, Takacs E. Best Practices for Reducing Bias in the Interview Process. *Curr Urol Rep.* 2022 Nov;23(11):319-325. doi: 10.1007/s11934-022-01116-7. Epub 2022 Oct 12. PMID: 36222998; PMCID: PMC9553626

13 Caligiuri, Paula, DiCaprio, Diana. How to Prepare for a Cross-Cultural Interview. *Harvard Business Review.* March 2023

14 Carter, E. R., Onyeodor, I. N., & Lewis, N. A. (2020). Developing & delivering effective anti-bias training: Challenges & recommendations. *Behavioral Science & Policy*, 6(1), 57-70

VII. Selection and Offer Process:



The selection and offer process is a critical stage in the hiring process, where organizations evaluate candidates and extend offers to the most suitable individuals. To ensure a fair and accepting process, it's essential to:

Develop Fair Criteria:

Establishing fair, transparent selection criteria ensures that all candidates are evaluated objectively. This helps create a level playing field in the hiring process.

Ensure Imperative Pay:

Conduct regular, impartial audits and ensure fair compensation packages for all hires to promote fairness. Impartial wages help attract and retain unique talent by demonstrating the organization's commitment to fairness.¹⁵

Consider Relocation:

Provide support and resources to candidates who need to relocate, demonstrating the organization's commitment to supporting new hires and their families. Offering support and resources to candidates who need to relocate ensures a smooth transition. Relational assistance demonstrates the organization's commitment to supporting new hires and their families.¹⁶

Comprehensive Communication:

Communicating transparently and respectfully with candidates throughout the selection and offer process is essential for maintaining trust and goodwill. Transparent and comprehensive communication reinforces the organization's commitment to adaptability and respect.¹⁷

¹⁵ Anderson, David, Bjarnadottir, V. Margot, A Better Way for Companies to Address Pay Gaps, Business Harvard Review, February 2024

¹⁶ Trapp, Roger, Why Helping Employees Relocate Can Be Good For Business, Forbes-Leadership, October 2023

¹⁷ Wolfruber, D. and Einwiller, S. (2023), "Diversity, Inclusion, and Communication: The Role of Internal Communication in Creating an Inclusive Work Environment", Rodríguez-Salcedo, N., Moreno, Á., Einwiller, S. and Recalde, M. (Ed.) (Re)discovering the Human Element in Public Relations and Communication Management in Unpredictable Times (Advances in Public Relations and Communication Management, Vol. 6), Emerald Publishing Limited, Leeds, pp. 81-97

VIII. Onboarding and Integration:



Effective onboarding and integration are crucial for helping new hires transition smoothly into the organization and feel valued. By providing comprehensive support, fostering cultural acclimatization, and offering mentorship, organizations can create a welcoming environment that supports employee success and retention. By following these guidelines, organizations can create a welcoming environment that supports employee success and retention, thereby fostering a positive and productive workplace.

Effective Onboarding:

Providing comprehensive support from day one helps new hires integrate smoothly into the organization and fosters a sense of value. Effective onboarding programs are crucial for retaining and setting new employees up for success.¹⁸

Social Acclimatization:

Providing resources and support for social adjustment, such as social training and mentorship programs, facilitates the acclimation of new hires to the organizational culture. This support fosters a sense of belonging and enhances employee satisfaction.¹⁹

Mentorship Programs:

Pairing new hires with mentors provides guidance and support, facilitating career growth and development. Mentorship programs are vital for helping new employees navigate their roles and advance within the organization.²⁰

Comprehensive Policies:

Ensuring that organizational policies and practices are in place fosters a sense of belonging in the work environment. Organizational policies help create a workplace where everyone feels valued and respected.²¹

18 Frögéli E, Jenner B, Gustavsson P. Effectiveness of formal onboarding for facilitating organizational socialization: A systematic review. PLoS One. 2023 Feb 16;18(2): e0281823. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0281823. PMID: 36795691; PMCID: PMC9934447

19 Marsiglia FF, Booth JM. Cultural Adaptation of Interventions in Real Practice Settings. Res Soc Work Pract. 2015 Jul 1;25(4):423-432. doi: 10.1177/1049731514535989. PMID: 26213454; PMCID: PMC4512185

20 Hinton AO Jr, Vue Z, Termini CM, Taylor BL, Shuler HD, McReynolds MR. Mentoring minority trainees: Minorities in academia face specific challenges that mentors should address to instill confidence. EMBO Rep 21: e51269, 2020. doi:10.15252/embr.202051269

21 Esquiedo-Leal JL, Houtmanfar RA. Creating Inclusive and Equitable Cultural Practices by Linking Leadership to Systemic Change. Behav Anal Pract. 2021 Feb 11;14(2):499-512. doi: 10.1007/s40617-020-00519-7. PMID: 33613858; PMCID: PMC7877509

IX. Retention Strategies:

Retention is a crucial aspect of building and maintaining a flexible and comprehensive workforce. By understanding and addressing the unique challenges faced by underrepresented employees and implementing effective retention strategies, organizations can create a supportive and welcoming environment that fosters employee satisfaction, engagement, and long-term success. By following these guidelines, organizations can create a belonging workplace that fosters employee retention, engagement, and success for all.

Understanding Challenges:

Identifying and addressing the unique challenges faced by under-resourced employees is crucial to enabling organizations to develop targeted strategies that support and retain their talent. Learn how to identify and address the specific challenges faced by under-resourced employees, allowing organizations to develop targeted strategies to support and retain adaptable/varied talent.²²

Creating a Supportive Environment:

Learn how to cultivate a workplace culture where all employees feel valued, respected, and included, thereby enhancing retention and satisfaction. A supportive environment encourages employees to stay and thrive within the organization.²³

Encouraging Career Growth:

Providing opportunities for career advancement and development is crucial for retaining top talent in leadership roles. Organizations that invest in employee growth are more likely to retain their top performers.²⁴

Implementing Feedback Mechanisms:

Learn how to use regular feedback and performance evaluations to support employee growth, development, and career advancement. Implementing regular feedback mechanisms and performance evaluations supports employee growth and development. Constructive feedback helps employees enhance their skills and advance their careers.²⁵

Establishing Networks:

Forming employee resource groups and affinity networks offers support, mentorship, and networking opportunities. These networks help build a sense of belonging and support among employees.²⁶

22 Xuecheng W, Iqbal Q, Saina B. Factors Affecting Employee's Retention: Integration of Situational Leadership With Social Exchange Theory. *Front Psychol*. 2022 Jul 11;13:872105. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.872105. PMID: 35899015; PMCID: PMC9309793

23 Mitchell AK, Apenteng BA, Boakye KG. Examining Factors Associated With Minority Turnover Intention in State and Local Public Health Organizations: The Moderating Role of Race in the Relationship Among Supervisory Support, Job Satisfaction, and Turnover Intention. *J Public Health Manag Pract*. 2022 Sep-Oct 01;28(5): E768-E777. doi: 10.1097/PHH.0000000000001571. PMID: 35867516; Thissen L, Biermann-Teuscher D, Horstman K, Meershoek A. (Un)belonging at work: an overlooked ingredient of workplace health. *Health Promot Int*. 2023 Jun 1;38(3): daad 061. doi: 10.1093/heapro/daad061. PMID: 37326404; PMCID: PMC10273830).

24 Kumar, Pooja, Lurie, Emily, Parthasarathy, Ramya. Building the US public-health workforce of the future. McKinsey & Company. Feb 2022

25 Gnepp J, Klayman J, Williamson IO, Barlas S. The future of feedback: Motivating performance improvement through future-focused feedback. *PLoS One*. 2020 Jun 19;15(6): e0234444. Doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0234444. PMID: 32559254; PMCID: PMC7304587

26 By Catalino, Natacha, Gardner, Nora, Goldstein, Drew, Wong, Jackie. Effective employee resource groups are key to inclusion at work. Here's how to get them right. McKinsey & Company. Dec 2022

X. Measuring and Monitoring Progress on Social Initiatives:

Social initiatives are crucial for fostering a more belonging and supportive workplace. To ensure continuous improvement, it is essential to track progress and measure the effectiveness of these initiatives. By following these steps and incorporating the suggested enhancements, organizations can effectively measure and monitor social progress, creating a more positive work environment for all employees.

Establish Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):

Establishing key performance indicators (KPIs) to track progress on I initiatives and assess effectiveness is essential for continuous improvement.²⁷

Examples of KPIs:

- Percentage of unique hires
- Employee turnover rates by demographic
- Promotion rates for impoverished/high-need/under-resourced groups
- Employee engagement survey results

Regularly analyzing social demographic data helps identify trends, challenges, and opportunities for improvement. Utilizing data visualization tools and root cause analysis can also help uncover patterns and insights.²⁸

Adjust social Initiatives:

Making data-driven adjustments to initiatives based on outcomes and feedback is crucial for ensuring ongoing effectiveness. Flexibility and responsiveness to feedback help maintain the relevance and impact of social efforts. Consideration should be given to piloting new initiatives before full-scale implementation.²⁹

Recognize and Celebrate Successes:

Recognizing and celebrating successes and best practices reinforces a positive environment. Celebrating achievements motivates employees and highlights the organization's commitment to distinction of under-resourced communities.³⁰

27 Purbey, S., Mukherjee, K. and Bhar, C. (2007), "Performance measurement system for healthcare processes," International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management, Vol. 56 No. 3, pp. 241-251. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17410400710731446>, Köllen, T. (2021).

Diversity Management: A Critical Review and Agenda for the Future. Journal of Management Inquiry, 30(3), 259-272.

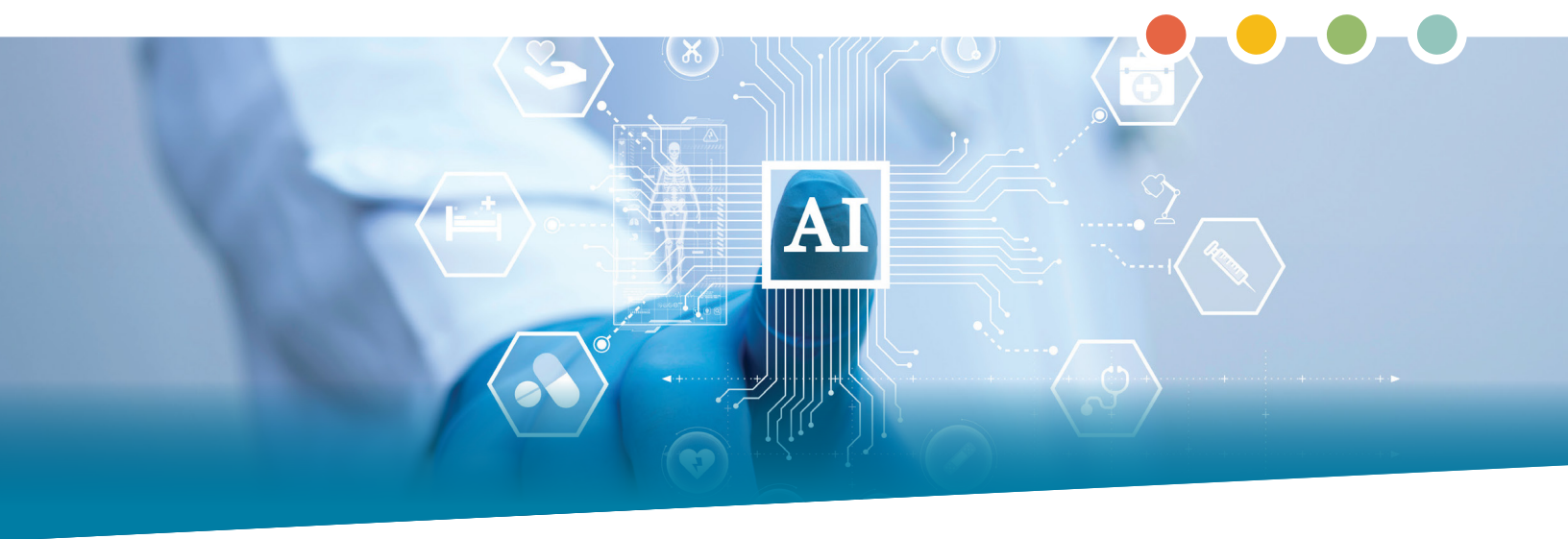
28 Köllen, T. (2021). Diversity Management: A Critical Review and Agenda for the Future. Journal of Management Inquiry, 30(3), 259-272.

29 Lingras KA, Alexander ME, Vrieze DM. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Efforts at a Departmental Level: Building a Committee as a Vehicle for Advancing Progress. J Clin Psychol Med Settings. 2023 Jun;30(2):356-379. doi: 10.1007/s10880-021-09809-w. Epub 2021 Sep 16.

PMID: 34529234; PMCID: PMC8444514; Van Gilder, B.J., Austin, J.T., & Bruscella, J.S. (Eds.). (2023 Nov). Communication and Organizational Changemaking for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: A Case Studies Approach (1st ed.). Routledge.

30 Harper, Jane. Celebrating Diversity and Inclusion in the workplace: A Comprehensive Guide. The HR Digest. April 2024.

XI. AI & the Public Health Workforce



Section XI explores how AI can address the impending public health workforce shortage. It covers AI's role in mitigating these shortages, improving workforce assortment and hiring, and personalizing education and training. The section also examines AI's potential to reduce subjective opinions and its challenges, including how to address them in healthcare data. Collaboration among stakeholders is highlighted as crucial for creating impartial AI systems, particularly for impoverished populations.

This section concludes by discussing the importance of responsible AI adoption in building an adaptable and resilient public health workforce.

AI's Role in Addressing Workforce Shortages:

The public health workforce is **facing a crisis**, with over 129,000 practitioners expected to leave by 2025. This shortage particularly impacts impoverished populations that rely heavily on public health services.

History and Current Applications of AI in Public Health:

Effective implementation of AI will require coordination among policymakers, healthcare providers, technologists, and communities to ensure equitable AI systems, particularly for under-resourced populations.

Workforce Decline and AI's Potential Solutions:

From 2008 to 2019, the public health workforce declined by **16-19 percent**. Workers cite job dissatisfaction and lack of motivation as reasons for leaving.

Historical Context and Modern Needs:

Public health integrates various sciences and health promotion today, requiring a robust workforce. National medical crises disproportionately affect communities of color, highlighting the need for a resilient public health infrastructure.

Challenges in the Workforce:

A lack of adaptability was particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, which exacerbated existing public health gaps. Patients with pre-existing conditions suffered disproportionately severe outcomes. Low-income individuals and people of color were more likely to die from COVID-19 due to factors such as vaccine hesitancy and distrust in the government and healthcare providers.

Economic and Social sensitivities:

Economic and social conditions, such as living in distressed communities with limited access to nutritious food and working in high-exposure environments, further increase vulnerability. Current workforce demographics reveal significant imbalances among populations.

Population -programs and AI:

Efforts to curb health issues, such as a CDC-funded asthma program for populations (**Promotores de Salud**), highlight the importance of a robust public health workforce. The program, which significantly reduced asthma morbidity, relied heavily on engagement and traditional case management.

Collaborative Efforts for Fair AI:

Alongside general stakeholder education and engagement, collaboration between physicians, healthcare educators, investigators, students, technologists, and others will create a more robust path toward the fair use of AI on medically fragile populations. An effort of this type also **helps to avert the misinformation and disinformation associated with AI, contributing to the history of distrust and hesitancy among under-resourced populations.**

Building an adaptable workforce with AI:

Enhancing the public health workforce by using AI tools to support and supplement their roles could help drive broader adoption of responsible AI. However, this progress will depend on public policies, health education, and patients' willingness to embrace it for the public good and benefit.

AI in Education and Training:

AI can personalize **curriculum and training** for public health workers, such as health educators and clinicians, by assessing their skills and providing tailored learning opportunities. AI can also help compile fair healthcare use cases and documentation to support real-time training and assessment.

Mitigating Hiring Subjectivism with AI:

AI can **help mitigate hiring biases by identifying qualified candidates** from diverse backgrounds. AI tools can screen for qualities relevant to public health roles, potentially identifying candidates from other fields who possess valuable skills.

Addressing AI Subjectivism in Healthcare:

AI faces significant challenges due to biases stemming from **poor data quality**. Underrepresented populations in datasets can lead to inaccurate AI outputs, particularly in healthcare, where diagnostic accuracy is crucial.

Opportunities & Challenges of AI

- AI presents both opportunities and challenges in public health. AI's applications range from predictive modeling to automated patient care, but its efficacy and ethical implications require careful consideration. Programs like the **1867 Health Innovations Project** at Howard University aim to integrate comprehensive AI to reduce healthcare gaps and gaps in health outcomes.

Further Considerations

Impact on the Labor Market

- **AI impacts the labor market**, particularly for under-resourced workers, who are overrepresented in jobs susceptible to automation. Studies suggest that focusing on skills less likely to be automated could help these workers build resilience.

Privacy Concerns with AI

- Powerful AI analytics can infer health status from non-medical data, raising privacy concerns. This is especially pertinent in reproductive health **post-Dobbs v. Jackson decision**, where data from period-tracking apps and other sources can be used against individuals.

Policies and Recommendations for Ethical AI Use

- Current policies and proposed legislation aim to guide the ethical use of AI. **The White House's Blueprint for an AI Bill of Rights** and various congressional bills focus on reducing subjectivism, improving transparency, and ensuring AI systems are comprehensive.

Digital Divide & AI

- Limited broadband access affects the effectiveness of AI in public health. **AI's success depends on internet access for both patients and providers.** Efforts to close the digital divide, such as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, are crucial for fair AI implementation in healthcare.

Reference: Lee, N. (2024, July 16). Can Artificial Intelligence Save the Public Health Workforce?

XII. Resources and Tools:

Organizations:

Partnering with established public health organizations can provide invaluable guidance and support.

Key resources include:

- **American Public Health Association (APHA):**
The APHA offers many resources, including policy statements, publications, and training opportunities focused on advancing.
- **National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO):**
NACCHO provides tools, training, and technical assistance to local health departments to address.
<https://www.naccho.org/>

Readings and Research:

Building a solid foundation requires ongoing learning. Consider incorporating the following resources into your professional development:

- Kiradoo, Giriraj, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Workplace: Strategies for Achieving and Sustaining a Diverse Workforce (December 20, 2022). Advance Research in Social Science and Management, Edition 01 (2022), pp. 139-151, Available at SSRN:
- Cox, T. H. Jr. (2018). Diversity in Organizations: Theory, Research, and Practice. Sage Publications.
- Garg, S., & Sangwan, S. (2021). Literature Review on Diversity and Inclusion at Workplace, 2010–2017. Vision, 25(1), 12-22.
- Barak, M. E. M. (2022). Managing Diversity: Toward a Globally Inclusive Workplace. Sage Publications.

Templates and Checklists:

Practical tools can streamline implementation. Consider providing access to resources like:

- job description templates: Develop clear and unbiased job descriptions that attract candidates.
- training program outlines: Create effective training programs that address.
- Assessment tools: Evaluate your organization's progress and identify areas for improvement.

Training Materials:

Investing in training is essential for building a strong workforce. Explore these options:

- Online courses and webinars: Offer accessible and flexible learning opportunities on leadership.
- I Training: To increase awareness of and utilize evidence-based training modules offered by organizations like Project Implicit.
- Training: Provide training that equips staff with the knowledge and skills to work effectively with populations.

A Practical Language Framework for Fair Access, Workforce Development, and Community-Responsive Public Health Hiring

Introduction

Local and county public health departments face significant workforce challenges, including staffing shortages, competition for qualified candidates, employee burnout, and the need to recruit and retain professionals who can effectively serve their communities. Human Resources professionals and hiring managers play a central role in addressing these challenges by strengthening recruitment practices, improving retention strategies, and fostering workplace environments that support employee engagement, professional growth, and long-term service.

This framework is a practical resource for Local and County Public Health HR and Hiring Managers to support consistent, fair, and effective workforce practices. It offers clear, constructive terminology for use in job descriptions, recruitment materials, interview processes, onboarding, employee engagement, retention strategies, and public-facing communications. The goal is to help public health agencies clearly and appropriately communicate their commitment to equal opportunity, fair access, skills-based hiring, community responsiveness, and workforce development.

Rather than relying on terminology that may be interpreted inconsistently or perceived as politically sensitive, this framework emphasizes language directly tied to public health workforce needs. Key concepts include expanding applicant pools, reducing barriers to career pathways, adopting structured, merit-based hiring practices, fostering employee belonging and engagement, and building a workforce that understands and responds to local community needs.

The framework also recognizes that public health effectiveness depends on trust. Local and county health departments benefit when their workforce includes professionals who understand community conditions, communicate effectively with residents, and serve as trusted messengers across routine services, public health emergencies, and outreach. By using clear, practical language, HR and hiring managers can strengthen recruitment and retention while remaining aligned with civil rights principles, organizational policies, and public health priorities.

Ultimately, this framework is designed to help public health agencies build stronger, more stable, and more community-responsive workforces. It supports HR and hiring managers in communicating workforce goals clearly, consistently, and professionally, advancing the shared mission to protect and improve the health of all communities.

Below is a practical glossary of **acceptable alternatives to DEI terminology** for grants, workforce programs, public health communications, and partner outreach. Given the current federal scrutiny of DEI language, the safest wording emphasizes **equal opportunity, merit, workforce shortages, access, community needs, skills-based recruitment and retention, and nondiscrimination**. EEOC guidance notes that “DEI” is not defined in Title VII and that employment practices may raise legal concerns if decisions are based, in whole or in part, on race, sex, or another protected characteristic. Federal executive actions have also emphasized civil-rights compliance and “merit-based opportunity.”

Glossary of Acceptable Terms

Instead of Saying	Consider Using	How to Use It
Diversity	Workforce representation	"Strengthen workforce representation that reflects the communities served."
Equity	Fair access / equal opportunity	"Expand fair access to career pathways and training opportunities."
Inclusion	Belonging / welcoming workplace	"Promote a workplace culture where employees feel valued and supported."
DEI	Workforce development and opportunity	"The initiative supports workforce development and opportunity in public health."
Diverse workforce	Community-responsive workforce	"Build a community-responsive public health workforce."
Racial equity	Reducing barriers to opportunity	"Identify and reduce barriers that limit access to public health careers."
Underserved communities	Communities with limited access to services	"Improve outreach to communities with limited access to health and workforce resources."
Marginalized populations	Populations facing barriers to access	"Support populations facing barriers to education, employment, and health services."
Minority communities	Historically underrepresented communities / community populations	"Engage historically underrepresented communities in health career awareness."
Cultural competency	Cultural responsiveness	"Provide culturally responsive communication and engagement strategies."
Anti-racism	Nondiscrimination and respectful workplace practices	"Promote nondiscrimination and respectful workplace practices."
Affinity group	Employee resource group / professional support network	"Support employee resource groups that improve retention and professional development."
Targeted recruitment by race/ethnicity	Broad-based outreach to expand applicant pools	"Use broad-based outreach to expand applicant pools across schools, professional associations, and community networks."
Priority populations	Populations with documented workforce or service access needs	"Focus on populations with documented barriers to health workforce pathways."
Health equity	Improving access and outcomes	"Improve access to health services and workforce pathways in communities with documented need."

Instead of Saying	Consider Using	How to Use It
Social justice	Fairness, access, and opportunity	"Advance fairness, access, and opportunity in health career development."
Environmental justice	Community environmental health needs	"Address community environmental health needs through workforce training and outreach."
Structural racism	Systemic barriers / institutional barriers	"Identify systemic barriers that affect recruitment, retention, and career advancement."
Implicit bias training	Objective decision-making training	"Train hiring teams on objective decision-making, structured interviews, and consistent evaluation criteria."
Equitable hiring	Structured, skills-based hiring	"Use structured, skills-based hiring practices to improve consistency and fairness."
Inclusive leadership	Effective and responsive leadership	"Support effective and responsive leadership practices that strengthen employee engagement."

Strong Terms for Federal or Grant-Funded Workforce Narratives

These terms are generally safer and more aligned with workforce, public health, and civil-rights compliance language:

Equal opportunity

Use when describing access to education, employment, internships, fellowships, mentoring, or leadership development.

Merit-based opportunity

Use when emphasizing that selection, hiring, promotion, or advancement is based on qualifications, experience, skills, and performance.

Skills-based recruitment

Use when describing hiring tools, job descriptions, structured interviews, and competency-based selection.

Workforce shortage

Use when explaining why the program is needed without relying on politically sensitive terminology.

Community-responsive workforce

Use when describing a workforce that understands local needs, languages, geography, and public health conditions.

Trusted messengers

Use when describing public health workers who can improve communication, outreach, and uptake of services in communities.

Barriers to access

Use instead of more politically charged language when describing obstacles to education, employment, healthcare, or professional advancement.

Retention and career advancement

Use when discussing employee support, professional development, mentoring, supervision, and organizational culture.

Belonging and employee engagement

Use carefully to describe workplace climate, morale, participation, and retention without suggesting preferences based on protected characteristics.

Nondiscrimination

Use when reinforcing compliance with civil rights laws, fair treatment, and objective employment practices.

Terms to Use Carefully

Some terms may still be appropriate depending on the funder, audience, or legal context, but should be tied to documented need, program purpose, and neutral eligibility criteria:

Term	Safer Framing
Underserved	"Communities with limited access to health services or workforce pathways."
Underrepresented	"Groups underrepresented in the public health workforce based on documented workforce data."
Equity	"Fair access," "equal opportunity," or "reducing barriers."
Inclusion	"Belonging," "employee engagement," or "welcoming workplace culture."
Diversity	"Workforce representation," "broad applicant pools," or "community-responsive workforce."

Terms to Avoid or Minimize in Sensitive Federal Contexts

Avoid or minimize language that could be interpreted as preference-based or quota-based:

Avoid	Why
Race-based preference	Suggests selection based on protected class.
Quotas	Legally and politically sensitive.
Set asides based on race or ethnicity	May raise compliance concerns.
Preferential hiring	Could imply unequal treatment.
DEI mandate	Politically sensitive and vague.
Equity requirement	May be interpreted as outcome-based preference.
Anti-racist hiring	Better reframed as nondiscrimination, structured hiring, and objective evaluation.
Identity-based selection	Use neutral, qualifications-based criteria instead.

Terms to Avoid or Minimize in Sensitive Federal Contexts

Original:

"The program will advance DEI by recruiting diverse candidates into the public health workforce."

Revised:

"The program will strengthen the public health workforce by expanding outreach, increasing awareness of career pathways, and supporting fair access to training, mentoring, and employment opportunities for students and early-career professionals."

Original:

"The campaign promotes equity for underserved communities."

Revised:

"The campaign promotes improved access to public health career information, workforce resources, and recruitment tools for communities that face documented barriers to health services and career pathways."

Original:

"We will use DEI strategies to improve hiring."

Revised:

"We will use structured, skills-based recruitment and assessment practices to support consistent, fair, and merit-based hiring decisions."



Conclusion:

By implementing the strategies outlined in this guide, public health organizations can foster a more welcoming workforce, enhancing their effectiveness and accessibility of healthcare.

A unique workforce brings together a broad range of perspectives and experiences, which is crucial for addressing complex public health challenges and driving innovative solutions.

By understanding the landscape, developing targeted recruitment strategies, and creating a supportive organizational culture, public health organizations can ensure their workforce reflects their values, healthcare access for all, and fosters effective hiring, public health leadership, and management that can drive systemic change to improve public health outcomes.

Key takeaways:

- **Incorporating unique experiences is a strategic advantage.**
It fosters innovation, adaptability, and improved access to healthcare.
- **Addressing discrepancies is crucial.**
Significant **inconsistencies** persist in public health leadership and workforce representation. Addressing these inconsistencies is crucial to ensuring accessible and adaptable healthcare and enhancing public health outcomes.
- **Understanding demographics is key.**
A comprehensive understanding of outnumbered, unique, or under-resourced demographics is essential for practical recruitment efforts. Analyzing demographic data enables organizations to identify the specific needs and challenges faced by impoverished groups, facilitating more targeted and effective recruitment strategies.
- **Variation enhances socially competent care.**
Adaptable teams bring diverse perspectives and experiences, which are crucial for addressing complex public health challenges. Variation in the workforce enhances socially competent care, ensuring that healthcare services are responsive to the community's unique cultural needs.

