



Bridging the Gap: Cultivating Public Health Leaders Through Workforce Innovation and Experiential Learning

Applied Professional Experiences (APEX) Team

The APEX Team

exists to foster real-world experiences for aspiring public health professionals through three distinct programs offered within MCDPH.



- Established 2023
- Diverse professional backgrounds
- Separately funded
- Office of Organizational Excellence

APEX	Leadership Academy Internship	Dietetic Internship	Fellowship
Prerequisites	Anyone over 18 years old	Accredited nutrition undergraduate degree + graduate degree	Recent Graduate Degree
Length	8 to 13 weeks	1000 hours	2 years
Participants	8 interns	10 dietetic interns	6 fellows
Orientation	2 hours	2 weeks	4 weeks
Culminating Experience	Symposium	Management Week	Fellowship Showcase
Results In	Professional development and/or meets university course requirements	Eligibility to sit for the RDN credentialing exam	Professional career advancement

APEX Change Model

- Real-world exposure lacking
 - Skills gap
 - Unrealistic expectations
 - Lower retention rates
- Benefits from diverse workforce
- Apply a public health perspective





Recruitment

APEX Recruitment

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Structured application process
- Recruitment outside of school settings
- Paid positions

GOALS

- **Genuine interest in public health**
- **Equitable process**
- **Increased access**



Dietetic Internship Strategies

STRATEGIES

- Annual WIC leadership presentation
- Agency lunch and learns
- Individual 1:1 meetings



Incoming Class of 2026 has **five** dietetic interns from **five** different agencies



APEX Strategies

EXAMPLES

- Internship database
- Novel interview questions
- Public health infographic challenge

MARICOPA COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH

This infographic was created by a dietetic intern candidate for interview purposes only. It does not represent the official views or plans of Maricopa County.

Fighting Food Deserts in Maricopa County: The Role of Nutrition Professionals

Introduction
Access to Healthy Foods is one of the top 5 health priority tasks the Maricopa County Health Department addresses through its Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP).¹

Data has shown:

- There are 55 food deserts identified within Maricopa County.
- Of these, 43 food deserts are located in Phoenix.
- These 43 food deserts in Phoenix encompass nearly half of the city's population.²

The term of "Food Desert" defines:

- Area where residents struggle to access healthy and affordable food.
- Few or no big grocery stores located nearby.
- People often rely on convenience stores or fast-food options, which are usually less healthy.³
- Often in low-income neighborhoods.

Why Access to Healthy Foods Matters?*

- Access to healthy foods is crucial for well-being.
- Food deserts limit nutritious food options.
- Limited access can increase obesity, diabetes, and heart disease.
- Healthy food access supports a balanced diet and better health.

Healthy food is defined as foods that are fresh, affordable, & nutritious, such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, & low-fat dairy.

How Nutrition Professionals Can Make a Difference

The Role of Nutrition Professionals⁵

1. **Education Initiatives:** Educate communities on affordable healthy eating.
2. **Advocacy and Policy Support:** Champion policies for improving food availability.
3. **Community Collaboration:** Develop local farming and gardening projects.
4. **Program Development:** Create nutrition programs tailored to community needs.
5. **Research and Assessment:** Assess nutritional gaps and guide interventions.

References:

1. Maricopa County Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) | Maricopa County. AZ. 2020. <https://www.maricopa.gov/5302/Community-Health-Improvement>
2. City of Phoenix. 2020 Food Action Plan - Healthy Food for All. (2020). <https://www.phoenix.gov/files/2020/FoodActionPlan/2020-Food-Action-Plan-Healthy-Food-for-All.pdf>
3. Gialluisi, P. A., & F. M. & F. T. (2012). Characteristics and influential factors of food deserts. *Health Affairs*. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0122223>
4. National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity. Letourneau, C., Keyes, A., Beckman, A., Bahamand, R., Barakat, L., Bell, D., Canessa, R., Elanga, A., Escam, A., Fakhoury, S., Galt, P., Gattuso, D., Hines, K., Jones, G., Rodgers, A., Howell, G., Keyes, A., ... (2014). Healthy Food Retailer and Access Guide for Public Health Practitioners. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/healthy-food-retailer-access-guide.pdf>
5. CPE Monthly. Food Deserts - Understanding Healthy Eating Solutions - Today's Dietitian Magazine (2014). <https://www.cpejournal.com/resources/12/14/4-Healthy-Food-Deserts-Understanding-Healthy-Eating-Solutions>

Inversión en Becas Prácticas para Construir una Fuerza Laboral de Salud Pública Más Fuerte

DEPARTAMENTO DE SALUD PÚBLICA DEL CONDADO DE MARICOPA

DESARROLLAR HABILIDADES Y CONOCIMIENTO

Permitir a individuos adquirir conocimientos prácticos y habilidades especializadas a través del aprendizaje experiencial y experiencias prácticas en áreas sobre las desigualdades de salud, políticas y respuestas de emergencias.

CONTRIBUCIÓN A LA INVESTIGACIÓN Y PBE

A través de la investigación y el análisis de datos, los becarios pueden ayudar a desarrollar prácticas basadas en evidencia (PBE) para atender a las necesidades emergentes de salud pública en todo el Condado.

DESARROLLO DE LIDERAZGO Y CARRERA

Líder y dirigir proyectos preparará a los becarios para asumir roles de liderazgo y avanzar en sus carreras dentro de la organización y en la comunidad.

REDES PROFESIONALES Y COLABORACIÓN

Brindar a los becarios la oportunidad de crecer profesionalmente a través de la colaboración con colegas y la orientación y apoyo de expertos.

DIVERSIDAD Y EQUIDAD DE LA FUERZA LABORAL

Ofrecer a los becarios de grupos subrepresentados ingresen al campo de la salud pública para promover mejor la equidad en salud y satisfacer las necesidades de las diversas comunidades en el Condado.

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Learning

APEX Learning

Change Model Objectives

- High-quality learning experiences
- Professional development
- Robust orientation process

Goals

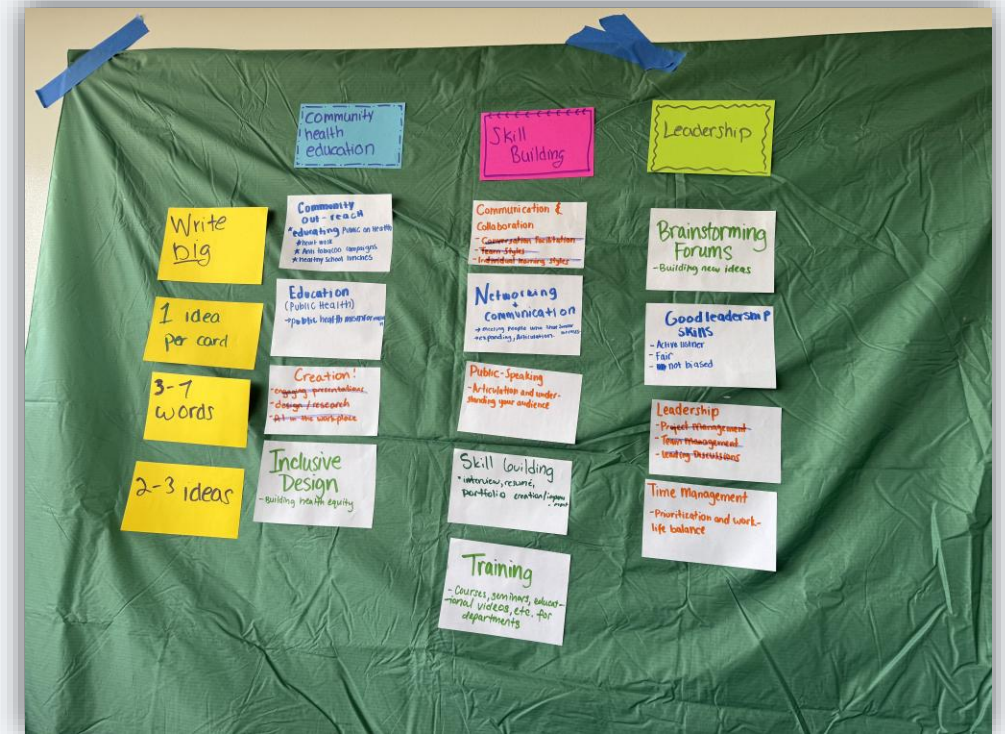
- Prepared to apply learning
- Value the applied experience
- Understand expectations

Defining Learning Experiences

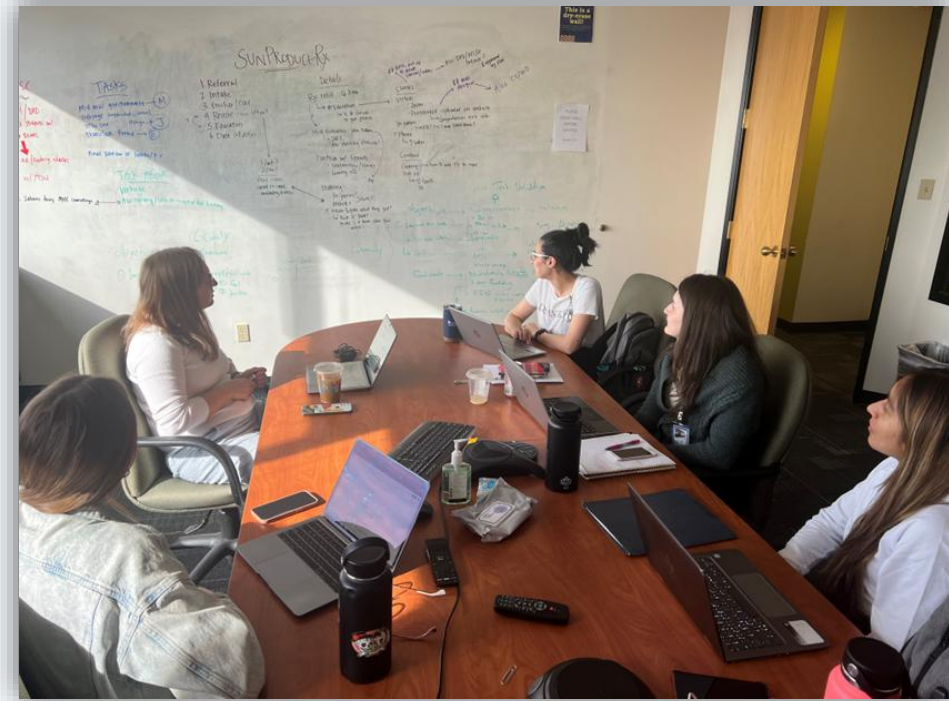
Using Tools to Enhance Experience

- Orientation introduces department, but focuses on cohort
- Technology of Participation Facilitation Method
- Define experience on day 1

Measure value of learning experiences



Learning Experiences



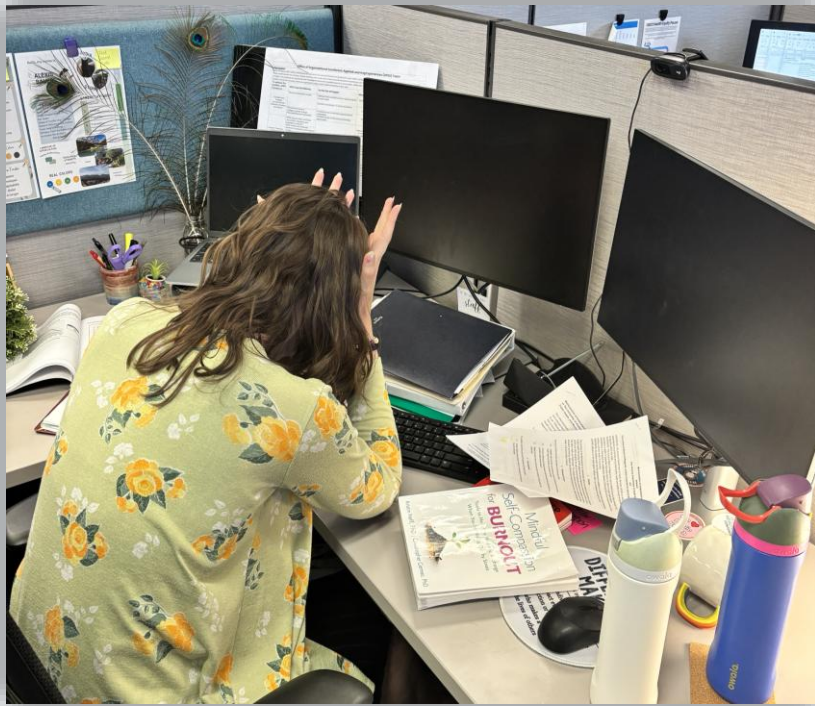
Collaboration

- Engage with department to provide training
- Defer to experts
- Collaborate within APEX to find opportunities



Support

Surviving or Thriving?



Support in Action

- POCs Quarterly Check-In
- 1:1 Meetings
- Fellow/POC Mixer
- Wisdom on Wednesdays
- Weekly Reflection



Support, Listen, Improve



- Preceptor/POC guidebooks
- Enhancing project readiness
- Tying work to PH competencies
- Adjusted timeline for feedback
- Intern onboarding eligibility
- Recommendation guidelines





Evaluation

Key Performance Indicators

- Program Capacity**
- Intern / Fellow Satisfaction**
- Preceptor / POC Satisfaction**

APEX Outcome

Competent new professionals from a variety of backgrounds entering their careers with realistic expectations, new skills, and knowledge of public health



Connect With Us



Visit our APEX website!

Reach out to Diana.Kinsfather@Maricopa.gov



Thank You