

Workforce Development

Turning Pandemic Response Into a Long Term Investment in Health Equity

The Tracing Health Program

The Public Health Institute (PHI) and the Oregon Public Health Institute (OPHI) created the Tracing Health program in the spring of 2020 to meet the needs of the COVID-19 pandemic and to mitigate the exacerbation of health inequities. Tracing Health combines best practices and an equity-driven approach to provide a comprehensive suite of support services to health departments and healthcare partners navigating COVID-19 response and recovery.

A Tracing Health Employee Spotlight: Carrie Rose, Workforce Development Advisor

The Tracing Health program was launched with an equity imperative built in. The program directors Dr. Marta Induni (PHI) and Emily Henke (OPHI) understood that to provide the most effective COVID-19 response services they would need to build workforce that was both culturally and linguistically responsive to the communities the program would serve. The leadership team committed to an impact hiring strategy that prioritized community-based recruitment.

But their vision went further, and in recognition of the unique moment, and acknowledging that COVID-19 contact tracing is a time-limited employment opportunity, the Tracing Health leadership wanted to build a team that could not only respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, but that would be trained to be a part of the diverse healthcare, public health, and allied health workforce of the future.

In Fall of 2020, the leadership team brought on Carrie Rose as the Senior Advisor of Workforce Development. Carrie came to Tracing Health with an extensive background in education and training. Carrie oversaw the development of a thorough Workforce Development plan that would build the capacity of all of Tracing Health staff and then match the training with the needs and career paths that currently exist in the public health field.

Carrie reflects on the opportunity that Tracing Health presented:

“What I loved about this plan is that most folks do not have the advanced vision to build in workforce development with a job. And here we had this situation where the pandemic provided an opportunity for people to be able to work remotely. So we could hire folks and provide them equipment and training that might have not been possible or available if they had had to come to a call center or be part of our work in a geographic location.”

—Carrie Rose, Senior Advisor Workforce Development

The goal was to provide employees with a wide array of optional ongoing professional development and education programs to support successful reentry into the job market. Carrie acknowledges that what really made the opportunity unique was that it was paired with an impact hiring strategy that prioritized onboarding a new and diverse workforce best suited to work with the communities suffering most from health inequity.

Tracing Health’s Impact Hiring Approach

The Tracing Health team intentionally recruited from communities of color, rural, and low-resource areas with a specific focus on onboarding a bilingual / multilingual staff. By centering cultural competency and primary language services Tracing Health ensured that their teams were well equipped to establish trust and encourage positive health behaviors (e.g., quarantining and resource coordination) with the most high-need neighborhoods. For many impact hires, this was their first foray into remote office work so Tracing Health designed a custom training program to ensure success, confidence, and competence in their work duties.

Workforce Development Program

Carrie’s workforce development team designed a Workforce Development (WFD) program that would build on the skills team members gained through their Tracing Health training by adding opportunities for capacity building, career planning, and fostering connections to public health professional pathways.

To start, the Tracing Health WFD team conducted an extensive staff listening campaign in February and March of 2021 to identify critical areas of workforce development. In addition, the WFD team gathered Information via individual interviews, focus groups, and team meetings to ensure employees had the opportunity to engage in conversations directly, offer feedback, and help shape the program.

Figure 1. “Bulding A Path : Framework Testing Process Steps”

INQUIRY:

Given our goals and timeframe, what can we leverage internally and what will we need help with externally?

INTERNAL RESOURCES:

- Tracing Health Team Infrastructure
- Trusting relationships with Tracing Health Leadership
- Existing Talent (PD/recruiting/communication teams, CTs)
- Community Partnerships (Futuro, Upwardly Global, Keck Graduate Institute, UCSC, etc.)
- Program Budget and Grant Goal/Priority



EXTERNAL NEEDS:

- Social Emotional Learning & Wrap Around Supports
- Job Fair Providers- out side contracts needed
- Job Panel Experts- subject matter experts
- Technical writing (guide)
- Community Partnerships (Futuro, Upwardly Global, Keck Graduate Institute, UCSC, etc.)

“ We went about supporting staff by identifying the areas that staff wanted additional resources. From this we were able to be dedicated to growing their own capacity and then created a structure for them to be able to engage in those resource building opportunities. ”

—Carrie Rose, Senior Advisor Workforce Development

Workforce Development Program (continued..)

As a result of this employee engagement, six pillars of support were identified and implemented for the Workforce Development (WFD) Program:

- ① **Professional Development.** Employee stipends were made available for training, conferences, certifications, and other professional development opportunities. In addition, PHI's Percipio Training Platform was provided to all Tracing Health staff free of charge through 2021.
- ② **Professional Certifications.** All Tracing Health employees were issued an individual license to Coursera for one year, at no cost to the employee, providing access to over 4,500 professional certification options.
- ③ **Individual Coaching.** Direct, one-to-one support and feedback for staff on resumes, LinkedIn profiles, networking opportunities, interview skills, and employment searches. Small group sessions were available for peer-to-peer networking and discussions.
- ④ **Employee Evaluations.** A program evaluation specific to the Tracing Health program captured employee strengths and identified career enhancement opportunities.
- ⑤ **Employment Pathways.** Job fairs and webinars focusing on the Pacific Northwest and California regions featured employers and employment entry guidance from community-based organizations, policy and advocacy agencies, environmental health, the Peace Corps, community clinics, and other groups specializing in public health. PHI and OPHI also highlighted internal retention and employment opportunities.
- ⑥ **Social and Emotional Support.** An Alumni Network to promote and encourage networking and connection opportunities for Tracing Health employees.

By designing a WFD program around these 6 pillars, the Tracing Health program was able to prepare their team members to pursue careers in public health beyond their employment with the program. These are motivated individuals who now have both the training and experience to be attractive candidates for employers. Tracing Health's networks of partnerships through PHI and OPHI help to create opportunities that align existing public health needs with the talents of the Tracing Health staff.

Offboarding Support

The WFD team also helped to coordinate offboarding support services for Tracing Health staff. Even after they leave the program, former employees had access to continue on in professional development classes and other certification programs. In addition employees employed through their mutually agreed-upon position end date were eligible to keep select pieces of equipment (computers, headphones, cameras) supplied by Tracing Health for personal or professional use and were eligible for a \$1,000 retention/severance payment.

By providing resources for people after they've left Tracing Health they were able to keep the newly unemployed team members engaged in the public health field as they start the job search process. With the WFD training and support offered by Tracing Health former employees not only had the benefit of a work history with a respected organization, but they had a set of hard and soft skills that prepare them for a variety of employment opportunities:

Offboarding Support – employment opportunities created (continued.)

Increased Capacity of the Tracing Health Workforce:

- ▶ **Remote work.** Team members have experience with solid audio/visual/written communication strategies, remote data collection and reporting, and compliance with HIPAA. Microsoft Teams, OneDrive, SharePoint, Microsoft Office Suite, Zoom, and VOIP are used regularly in the Tracing Health workforce.
- ▶ **Flexible and adaptable.** The evolving nature of the COVID-19 pandemic enabled staff to handle changing priorities with ease.
- ▶ **Training and certifications.** Onboarding includes 100+ hours of education and certifications, including multiple cloud-based contact tracing databases, soft skills such as self-care and mental health first aid, and communication techniques such as active listening and motivational interviewing.

Workforce Development Takeaways

Carrie Rose and her WFD team created a superior plan that has helped hundreds of former employees pursue continuing education and career opportunities. But this should not be a unique situation. Workforce Development should be integrated into all employment - Tracing Health should not be an outlier.

The pandemic laid bare not only the need for a larger and better trained public health workforce, but it also clearly demonstrated the dangers of systemic inequities. By investing in a public health workforce that comes from diverse and disadvantaged communities we are not only able to better address the present urgency of the COVID-19 pandemic but we are creating a better health safety net for all.

Workforce Development Outcomes (as of 8/19/21)

Professional Development

- 150+ trainings, job fairs, panels, lunchboxes Satisfaction rated at 4.45 out of 5 (highest) with 634 responses

Professional Certifications

- Coursera- 494 joined, 332 completed courses
- Community Healthcare Workers, Mental Health First Responders, etc

Individual Coaching

- 224 one on one sessions with recruiting team on resumes/interviews

Employment Pathways

- Focus on public health and allied health positions
- 10 job fairs, TH & PHI promotions, LinkedIn Job Pages, Exit Surveys

We are an experienced, effective and equity-driven contact tracing solution.

We are Tracing Health.
