



**Center for Public  
Health Systems**

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA



REGION **V** PUBLIC HEALTH  
TRAINING CENTER

# PUBLIC HEALTH MODEL JOB DESCRIPTIONS PROJECT

## USER GUIDE AND FAQS

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## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### What is the model job descriptions project?

The public health model job descriptions project is an initiative of the [Region V Public Health Training Center](#) at the University of Michigan School of Public Health and [Center for Public Health Systems](#) at the University of Minnesota School of Public Health. The goal is to create evidence-based job descriptions and attractive job postings that can be easily adapted by local and state health departments. The project began in spring 2022 and launched in November 2022. The project was led by Heather Krasna, PhD, MS, EdM, co-author of the book *101+ Careers in Public Health, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*, and a public health workforce consultant and researcher.

### What is the difference between a job description and a job posting?

A job description is an internal document used by human resources departments and hiring managers to provide a detailed description of the purpose of the job, the key tasks to be conducted, and the job requirements. A job posting is an externally-facing marketing document meant to attract qualified candidates to apply for the job.

### Why is a good job posting important?

A good job posting attracts qualified, diverse candidates, but a poorly-written job posting can turn away good candidates. A job posting which is heavy on jargon or regulatory documentation can confuse candidates. Subtle factors like word choice also have been shown to deter candidates based on race, gender, or disability. According to a survey by Indeed.com, “52% of job seekers say the quality of a job (posting) is very or extremely influential on their decision to apply for a job.”

A well-written job posting:

- Attracts candidates who are motivated to contribute to your organization’s mission
- Highlights the key benefits of working at your organization, including the organization’s mission, culture, and benefits
- Provides sufficient detail for applicants to understand the essential functions and activities of the job, how the job contributes to your organization’s mission, and how the job fits into the organizational structure
- Clearly indicates the knowledge, skills, abilities, education or certifications, and years of experience required to qualify for the job, but without discouraging qualified candidates from applying
- Is concise and easy to understand, avoids repetition, and uses bullet points rather than long paragraphs when possible.
- Is updated and current in all language.

## How was the project funded?

This project is supported in part by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) under grant number UB6HP31684 Public Health Training Centers (\$924,899) at the University of Michigan, as well as the Center for Public Health Systems at the University of Minnesota School of Public Health. This information or content and conclusions are those of the author and should not be construed as the official position or policy of, nor should any endorsements be inferred by HRSA, HHS, or the U.S. Government.

## Can our health department use these descriptions and postings “as is”?

The templates are meant as a recruitment job aid but not as a substitute for health departments conducting their own job analysis, working with their HR departments, etc. These job descriptions are not meant to replace those efforts, nor should they be construed as representing HR compliance guidelines.

These job descriptions and postings are meant as a starting point for health departments which are aiming to update existing descriptions or ensure their job descriptions are attractive to new candidates. Work with your HR or civil service department, especially to ensure the job matches a job analysis of the position and to ensure you are listing the essential functions of the role.

## What about differences in job levels, or areas of specialization?

Most of the job descriptions are meant to reflect a middle career level for most positions, unless otherwise specified. A “program manager” title might be adapted to be used for “program coordinator” by removing certain responsibilities such as budget management or supervision; or adapted for “program director” by adding higher-level responsibilities. Similarly, a public health nurse job description can be adapted for a maternal-child health specialization by adding specific duties and knowledge for that specialty.

## Why wasn't salary listed?

Salary ranges vary by geographic location, job level, and many other factors. Rather than indicating a specific salary, we left this information out, but would expect health departments to add a salary range for each position. As a follow-up to this project, Heather Krasna is planning a future study of recommended salary ranges for public health positions, through the [Consortium for Workforce Research in Public Health](#).

## How were the job descriptions created?

See “Methods” at the end of this document.

## Were Core Competencies included?

The Core Competencies for Public Health Professionals may be included, directly or indirectly, in job descriptions.

- In order to ensure job postings are short enough to attract candidates, we suggest including competencies as part of an internal-facing job description document, as part of an interview or selection process, or as part of an evaluation process when assessing current employees for promotions.
- Specific competencies or codes of ethics per occupation are listed in the job description templates and may be included or linked to at the discretion of health departments.

## What other tools will be available to help health departments improve their recruiting strategies?

This set of templates is meant to be part of a [larger recruitment toolkit](https://region2phtc.org/recruitment-toolkit/) (<https://region2phtc.org/recruitment-toolkit/>) including:

- A recruitment strategy training delivered via the [National Network of Public Health Institutes](#), local/regional conferences, and the [Region 2 Public Health Training Center](#);
- Tailored recruitment strategies for different candidate profiles, occupations, demographics, and geographic areas;
- A [governmental public health recruitment marketing website](#) designed to attract the general public and/or targeted occupations into public health careers; and
- Career education efforts to bring awareness of public health careers to the general public.

## LEGAL DISCLAIMER

These descriptions are not meant to replace the guidance of your human resources or civil service department, nor do they replace a thorough job analysis with specific information on the percentage time spent on different tasks. They are not meant as legally binding documents and are not meant to include information which may be specific to a particular agency with regard to probationary periods, union contracts, exempt vs. non-exempt positions, specific state or local regulations regarding the hiring of public health professionals, public health department accreditation, disability accommodations, or Americans with Disabilities Act requirements.

## TIPS FOR WRITING JOB DESCRIPTIONS

### Key elements of the job description:

**Job Title:** The job title should be clear and reflect the key elements of the job.

- A job title like “City Research Scientist I” or “Management and Program Analyst” may be the required civil service title, but these titles are unclear to many job seekers.
- A job title which is specialized for public health, like “Sanitarian” or “Disease Intervention Specialist,” may be confusing to those outside the field, who may otherwise be qualified. If needed, try a combination title, like “Environmental Health Inspector/Sanitarian.” Use the most commonly accepted terms, which a lay audience should understand.
- Levels can also be confusing; where possible, consider using “Senior Epidemiologist” rather than “Epidemiologist Level III.”
- Where possible, a title which indicates the program area the candidate will work on may be more appealing, such as “Maternal/Child Health Program Analyst” or “Environmental Health Inspector.”

### Job Summary

The opening section of the description should be 1-4 sentences, and should highlight the key functions of the job, the job’s contribution to the organization’s mission, and the organization’s mission and culture, using compelling language. This is an introduction to your “employer brand”—the words or images that are used intentionally to communicate to job-seekers why your organization is unique and a good place to work. Any special features of your organization, such as a vibrant city location, a beautiful rural location, affordable cost of living, or awards or accreditation for your health department should be mentioned here.

Using the [concept of public service motivation](#) to attract candidates can help health departments). Seeing their impact on the health of their communities, opportunities to create or implement programs that directly help people, contributing to research, or achieving recognition can all motivate applicants. Try using “invitational” language (“Come join our team to...”)

- *Example: The XYZ County Health Department’s mission is to build a healthier XYZ county by preventing illness, protecting the community from health risks, and promoting health and wellness so everyone in XYZ county can have the healthiest life. XYZ Health Department is offering an outstanding opportunity as a Community Health Worker. Come join our dedicated and mission-driven team, and you will enjoy excellent benefits and work/life programs, a superior retirement package, and the chance to see how your work directly improves the health of your community. XYZ’s Health Department has achieved PHAB Accreditation, distinguishing it as a top health department, and prides itself on providing a diverse and inclusive work environment with opportunities to grow and develop professionally. Be part of a team that gives every child a great start in life with good nutrition, serving 500 families each year.*

### Location

- Including an exact job location will improve searchability/search engine optimization for jobs. If a role can be done remotely, or can offer hybrid schedules, this should be indicated.

## **Responsibilities and Duties**

- Describe the duties of the job in enough detail to be understandable, while working to keep the posting concise (5-10 bullet points, maximum). Start with action verbs.
- List essential functions first. (Essential functions: the reason the job exists is to perform this function; consequences of not performing this function are severe). Give percentage of time spent on functions.
- Highlight how the role contributes to the bigger mission.
- Avoid using **gender-biased language** and avoid describing the person you want—focus on the job function and role. Always avoid reference to gender, race, religion, or other protected class.
- List physical demands/duties or special work conditions (nights, weekends, work with hazardous materials). Use ADA-friendly language.

## **Qualifications/Requirements**

- *Requirements:* Include a list of specific education, licenses/certifications, knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs), and/or years of experience required or preferred.
- *Desired qualifications:* Include desired skills or abilities, being careful to distinguish between required and desired skills. Be careful to consider whether a particular skill is required vs. desired.

## **Salary and Benefits**

- Including a salary band can be helpful to job seekers and is often required by government agencies. (See note above in the FAQ)
- Highlighting the value of benefits, especially where they exceed those of your competition, can also help job seekers understand the package of benefits offered in more detail. Benefits can include:
  - Vacation and sick time (specific number of days/year) and paid holidays
  - Training and development opportunities
  - Flexible work hours or telework options
  - Work-life balance
  - Paid overtime
  - Retirement benefits, especially pension plans which are more valuable than those offered in the private sector
  - Medical, dental, and vision coverage; disability insurance; life insurance; transit benefit
  - Tuition reimbursement
  - Public Service Loan Forgiveness or National Health Service Corps Loan repayment program eligibility, where applicable
  - “Career ladder” structures which allow for promotions or raises within a certain period of time
  - Union memberships or other job protections which exceed those provided in most sectors; other indicators of job security
  - Diversity and inclusion or affinity programs; commitment to diversity, inclusion, equity, and welcoming environment. Affirmative action commitment.
  - Environmental sustainability efforts of the department.



## ***Application Process***

Provide information regarding the application process, with a link to any tips for a civil service hiring process if needed. Ensure that you list how to request disability accommodations. If possible, include a contact person for questions.

## ***Posting Your Position***

- If possible, use an Applicant Tracking System or post your opportunities directly on job boards which have the largest viewership so that your jobs appear in search engine results.
- Consider distributing the job posting to local colleges or universities which have educational programs that fit your hiring needs; most of these services are free to employers.
- Ensure you are advertising and connecting with community-based organizations and other talent pools (such as workforce development programs, employment offices, reentry programs) to ensure that you reach a broad and representative applicant pool.

## ***Going Beyond the Posting***

- Consider adding a brief video from current staff explaining why they love their jobs or what they do on a typical day; or refer candidates to the videos at <http://publichealthcareers.org>
- Add photos with short bios of staff illustrating a key achievement or project they are proud of. Be sure to ensure diversity and broad representation of staff.

## METHODS

The creators of the job descriptions followed the process below to create the descriptions:

### **Background Research**

- Conducted literature reviews, gathering background information; reviewed trainings on recruitment marketing (Ultimate Job Description Handbook; JDXpert; Recruitics; datapeople)
- Conducted key informant interviews with several individuals in both public health and recruitment-related organizations
- Reviewed past research such as Denver Public Health Core Competency Annual Assessment, Determining Essential Core Competencies for Job Positions (Denver Public Health); User Guide & Resource Manual Guidance document for Columbus Public Health employees to complete the PCQ form and create functional public health competency-based job descriptions
- Conducted an analysis of frequent job tasks from the National Board of Public Health Examiners (NBPHE) 2014 job task analysis survey data to determine the most frequent tasks by job title
- Gathered and analyzed large-scale job postings data from Burning Glass Technologies
- Called representatives at ASTHO and NYSACHO to determine which occupations are highest priority

### **Job Description Process**

- Synthesized content from 5-10 existing job descriptions for each position from a data pull of 923 governmental public health job descriptions from Burning Glass from Oct.-Nov. 2021, structuring these into a representative sample of a job description
  - Compiled job tasks, requirements etc., thematically
  - Created a disambiguation section where necessary
- Added additional content from sources (where relevant) including:
  - Standardized occupational information from the US Department of Labor's Occupational Outlook Handbook and O\*Net Online website
  - Professional societies/organizations (e.g., NEHA; CSTE, etc.), some of which had previously conducted job task analyses with specific research methods documented
  - Core Competencies for Public Health Professionals; PHAB accreditation standards; prior research studies
  - NBPHE job task analysis data (from 2014) for respondents in government, categorized by job title, selecting those tasks with responses of 2.5 and higher
  - Additional Google searches; brief literature reviews

### **Vetting Process**

- Identified 5-10 individuals from each occupation and/or individuals representing the professional association for each occupation (and/or chapters of APHA, divisions of NACCHO, ASTHO etc.); additional distribution via social media and professional society outreach.
- Created and distributed a Qualtrics survey requesting feedback on the descriptions. Additional follow-up was conducted to ensure at least 3-5 individuals provided feedback on each job (a very small number had only one or two respondents even after extensive follow-up and outreach).
- Incorporated feedback into job descriptions.
- Additional review and editing with staff from Region V PHTC.

## **Marketing Review**

- Engaged the services of a professional recruitment marketing expert (Jody Ordioni at Brandemix) who revised the job descriptions into job postings, to ensure they fit as attractive recruitment marketing documents following best practices in recruitment and employer branding; search engine optimization (SEO) and online recruitment marketing, and avoidance of implicit bias in the language used
- Used [SAAS job writer tool](#) which analyzes the descriptions using a machine learning algorithm to remove language which may discourage diverse candidates from applying
- A final copy-editing review by Jennifer McGuire of Darning Needle Editing, including usage of the Conscious Style Guide to avoid implicit bias in job descriptions and postings

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

**Public health recruitment toolkit:** <https://heatherkrasna.com/public-health-recruitment-toolkit/>

Existing public health job description compilations:

- Public Health Foundation: [http://www.phf.org/programs/corecompetencies/examples/Pages/Job\\_Descriptions.aspx](http://www.phf.org/programs/corecompetencies/examples/Pages/Job_Descriptions.aspx)
- Massachusetts Health Officers Association: <https://mhoa.com/aws/MHOA/pt/sp/templates>

Articles on how to write job descriptions:

- <https://www.indeed.com/hire/how-to-write-a-job-description>
- <https://www.cio.com/article/230924/how-to-craft-highly-effective-job-descriptions.html>
- <https://ncwit.org/resource/jobdescriptionanalysis/>
- Ultimate Job Descriptions Playbook webinar [recording](#) and [slides](#); job description management with JDxpert listed [here](#).

WHO Human Resources for Health Workforce 2030

<https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/250368/?sequence=1>

**Human Resource Management in Public Service: Paradoxes, Processes, and Problems**, By Evan M. Berman, James S. Bowman, Jonathan P. West, Montgomery R. Van Wart

**Public Personnel Management**, By Norma M. Riccucci

<https://hrtalentiq.com/job-descriptions-and-job-postings/>

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