



Tips on the Environmental Health Officer (EHO) Junior Commissioned Officer Student Training and Extern Program (JRCOSTEP)

WHO: The U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) is one of the Nation's seven uniformed services and is under the Department of Health and Human Services. The USPHS has over 6,000 Commissioned Officers whose mission is "Protecting, Promoting, and Advancing the Health and Safety of the Nation".

WHAT: The USPHS offers internships through the JRCOSTEP. These training positions are available to fulltime students who have completed **at least 2 years** of study in a professionally accredited baccalaureate program, or **at least 1 year** in a professionally accredited master's degree program, in specific health disciplines that meet EHO requirements.

JRCOSTEPs work in the same exciting Federal agencies and programs as active duty Commissioned Corps officers. JRCOSTEP's receive the basic pay and allowances of an O-1 (Ensign) Officer unless they have prior military service; pay calculations will be determined by the USPHS Division of Commissioned Corps Personnel and Readiness (DCCPR).

WHEN: Assignments in locations throughout the country can be from a minimum of **31 to a maximum of 120 days**, but most assignments are between 60 and 90 days. Most JRCOSTEPs are hired for the summer months (e.g., June - August) with few exceptions.

WHERE: A JRCOSTEP is assigned a preceptor at a field location who will assign work related to the field of environmental health. Agencies most likely to hire an EHO JRCOSTEP are Indian Health Service (IHS), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR). Students get to request their agency and location preferences on the application; however, there is no guarantee that a student will be matched with what they requested.

HOW: The JRCOSTEP application and placement process is likely more involved than the typical environmental health internship. Here are some tips for interested students:

- **Call the USPHS Call Center at 1-888-225-3302** to determine your eligibility and to complete the prescreen questionnaire. You will be notified via email with further instructions on how to complete the application process.
- **Submit your application early!** Once you have successfully completed the prescreen process and have been notified, you can apply for a JRCOSTEP. **All materials will need to be in by the date given by the call center.**
- **Make sure you complete ALL the required components!** An application is not complete until all required materials are received by the USPHS. In addition to the application, you will also be asked to submit letters of reference, current official college transcripts, and medical forms. Additional materials will be required once an agency confirms sponsorship. This will include security and personnel forms.
- **Keep copies of your application!** Things can and do get lost, so please keep at least one copy of everything you submit.
- **Follow-up!** Students have a responsibility to follow-up on the status of an application and ensure a complete application. Not receiving reference letters and transcripts are the most common reasons for holding up applications.

Students interested in Environmental Health JRCOSTEPs should visit the "Applying to JRCOSTEP" section on the Commissioned Corps of the U.S. Public Health Service website <https://usphs.gov> for additional information.

- **Use agency contacts!** The JRCOSTEP application is processed by the USPHS but JRCOSTEP participants are selected and placed in assignments by agency contacts. Students are encouraged to work with their faculty advisors to identify and make contact with agencies seeking student interns and current USPHS Environmental Health Officers to increase their chance of selection.

Student Selection Tips

The following are some common reasons for selecting and not selecting students for JRCOSTEP assignments. This is provided to help understand the process, not as definitive rules.

Student Selection and Notification

Formal selection and notification of students typically takes place around March for that summer's JRCOSTEP assignments. Students that do not hear from the USPHS by late April have a low probability of being selected, but it is possible if other students turn down their opportunity or an agency is late to begin the selection process.

Common factors that contribute to selection

- **Direct recruitment:** a preceptor contacts the school or student and lines up an assignment.
- **Student seeks opportunity:** Students are also able to directly contact the agency of interest to find out if the agency is willing to provide sponsorship. This is essential in gaining a sponsorship if students missed agency selections week or completed an application late in the season.
- **Enrolled in School:** JRCOSTEP applicants must be enrolled fulltime in school to be eligible.
- **Good References:** Strong letters of recommendation increase chances of selection.
- **Good Grades:** Having a 2.80 or greater GPA is required.
- **Good "Fit":** The USPHS is not for everyone - we are looking for individuals with career potential, a willingness to accept any assignment and wear the USPHS uniform with pride, diverse work experience, and demonstrated leadership experience. In addition, students need to meet the physical fitness requirements, including height/weight standards.

Common factors that contribute to non-selection

- **Poor GPA, Weak References:** Having a GPA of less than 2.8, very few environmental health courses, very selective on assignment location or little leadership experience.
- **Limited Career Potential:** No plans of leaving home; no match of student interests and USPHS needs.
- **Close to Graduation:** JRCOSTEP participants must be in school to be eligible or they must return to college or to a post-graduate training program in a commissionable profession immediately following participation in JRCOSTEP.
- **Fail Medical Clearance:** The USPHS is a uniform service with physical fitness requirements. Students have been turned down for chronic health conditions and exceeding height/weight standards.
- **Conflicting Obligation:** The student must be free of any obligation or responsibility that would conflict with a call to active duty in the PHS Commissioned Corps.

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