Contacting
Field Placement
Sites

**18279 MPH Field Placement Preparation**

MEDICAL COLLEGE OF WISCONSIN

This presentation will focus on identifying and contacting organizations with which you could complete your field placement.

In this presentation, I will offer advice regarding appropriate sites and projects, and I will provide examples from previous students. Additionally, I will make recommendations regarding how to communicate with potential field placement sites about the course and your need for a site preceptor. Finally, I will discuss your next steps, whether you successfully recruit a field placement site or not.

**Identifying Sites**

- Appropriate Sites
- Potential & Previous Sites
- Developing Ideas
- Assignment
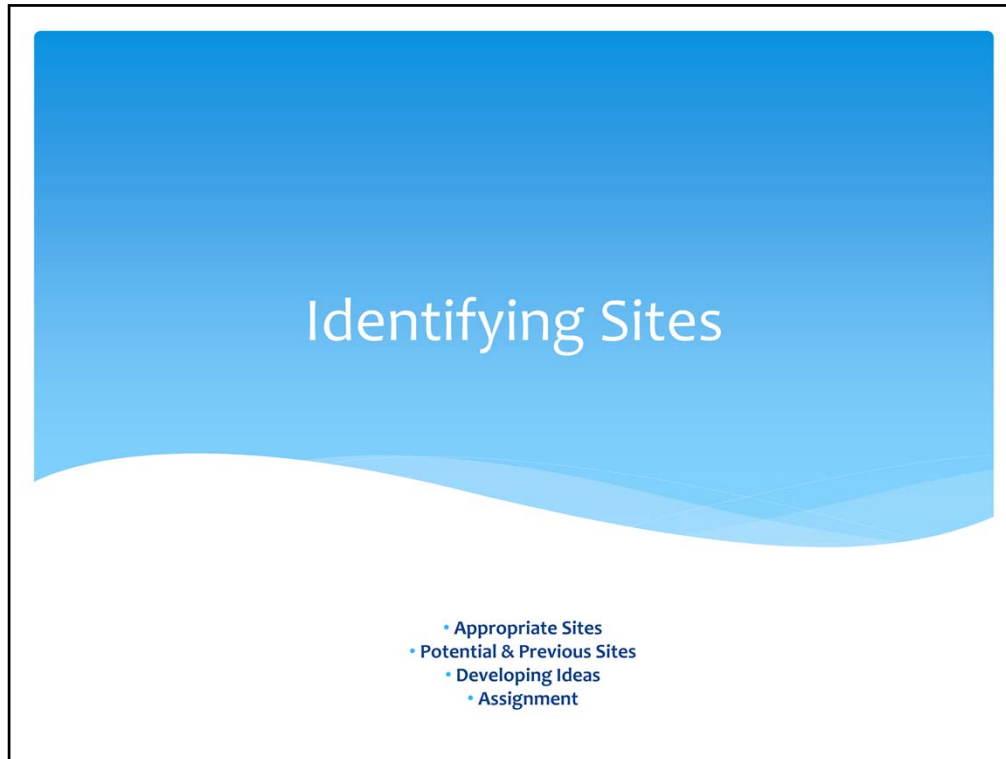
In this first section, I will explain how to identify organizations where you could conduct your field placement. I will discuss which types of sites are appropriate and what you should consider when recruiting a site. Additionally, I will provide resources regarding different sites students could and have utilized as well as tips on brainstorming where you would like to work. Finally, I will explain the next assignment that is due.

# Appropriate Sites

* Any organization that contributes to the health of a community
* Considerations:
    * Appropriateness and relevance of experience
    * Student and agency match
    * Availability of resources
    * Availability of a qualified preceptor
    * Program approval
    * Not your regular place of employment

PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICE

There are a wide variety of organizations that you could work with for your field placement. The main requirement is that the organization contribute to the health of a community. That is a very broad requirement, so it offers a lot of leeway. However, there are other considerations.

• The experience the organization offers must be appropriate to public health and relevant to your area(s) of interest. Since it is the purpose of the field placement, you must have the opportunity to engage in substantive tasks that will enable you to further develop and apply specific skills and competencies related to public health.

• Additionally, your needs and expectations must match those of the organization. It is extremely important for this project to be mutually beneficial. Your project should fulfill an organizational need, and it should be one that you are very interested in.

• The organization must be able to provide you with the resources necessary to complete your activities. If you need access to data or individuals, the organization must be able to provide that, or you will not be able to complete your project.

• The organization must also have a qualified preceptor with whom you can work. This person does not need to have an advanced degree in public health or any other field; however, he or she must have substantial experience in your project area, and he or she must be willing and able to spend notable time providing you with constructive feedback and guidance.

• Additionally, the program, meaning the program director and I, must approve of the site. We cannot give approval if the organization does not meet the other requirements, which include completing a site application form and entering into a legal agreement with the Medical College. I will provide more information about these requirements in a later presentation.

• Finally, I strongly encourage you to select a site other than your regular place of employment. If that is not feasible for you, then you may be able to complete a project at the organization you work at if the activities are outside the scope of your normal work and if they allow application of the knowledge and skills you gained through the MPH program. If you are in this situation, please contact me, and we will discuss it.

## Potential & Previous Sites

* Potential Sites
  * Community-based organizations
  * Local and state health departments
  * Managed care organizations
  * Consulting companies
  * Industrial settings
  * Hospitals or schools
  * Federal or international agencies
* List of sites at which previous students have conducted FPs

LOITOKITOK DISTRICT HOSPITAL
VISITING HOURS   MONDAY– SUNDAY
6:00 — 7:00 AM
1:00 – 2:00 PM
4:30 – 5:30 PM
CLINIC DAYS   MONDAY– FRIDAY
8:00 AM – 1:00 PM
2:00 PM – 5:00 PM

Since there are so many different kinds of sites that could be appropriate, you have numerous options.  Many of our students work with local health departments, but some students have worked with organizations that fall into other categories, such as non-profit, service, relief, community advocacy, education, and community research.  Other students have conducted their field placements at federally qualified health centers, clinics, and hospitals.  It really depends on your interests and the organizations that are working near you.

To view a list of the specific organizations that previous students have worked with, you can visit the field placement webpage entitled Previous Sites.

In trying to identify organizations where you would like to work, consider your areas of interest. Thinking back to the student interest form you completed, what populations and public health issues did you list as ones you are interested in? What organizations work with those populations or on those issues? Also, consider what you want to get out of your field placement. What are your goals? What type of project would help you achieve those goals? Which organizations in your area work on that type of project?

As I mentioned in the last slide, you can review a list of sites at which other students have conducted their field placements to get ideas. Additionally, community organizations have identified projects on which they would like student assistance. These projects are listed on the field placement webpage entitled Project Ideas. Clearly, these projects meet the requirement of the organization identifying them as a need, and they may also be of interest to you.

If none of the projects developed by sites are feasible for you and none of the organizations at which other students have worked interest you, you should identify a new site. In doing this, you should consider your personal and professional contacts. As is often said about job hunting: it is not what you know; it is who you know. You might be surprised what opportunities open up if you just mention the field placement to some of your associates or friends. Another option is to search the web to identify organizations in your area that work with the populations or issues you are interested in. If all else fails, please feel free to contact me, and we will brainstorm together.

Links

List of sites at which other students have conducted field placements and project ideas developed by community organizations:
http://http://www.mcw.edu/mphprogram/CulminatingExperiences/FieldPlacement/Siteandprojectideas.htm

Your assignment for this week is to identify three potential sites where you could conduct your field placement.  You should submit the names of these organizations in D2L in the drop box, and you should also begin contacting these sites to find out more about the organizations and start discussing potential projects.

**Contacting a Site**

Initial Communication
Recruiting a Site Preceptor
Site & Preceptor Responsibilities

Once you have identified organizations you are interested in working with, you have to contact them not only to find out more about their services and potential projects, but also to explain the field placement course, including your need for a site preceptor.

## Initial Communication

* Contact by phone/email/in person
  * Letter to Agency from the Program Director & Coordinator

* Introduce self & FP course
  * Education
  * Experience & Skills
  * Goals
  * Basic FP course info
    * 80 – 120 – 160 hours

You might initially contact a site via phone or email, but it is best if a more in-depth discussion occurs in person. This will give you a better feel for how the organization operates and if you would like to work with them. Previous students have indicated it would be helpful if they had a letter of introduction to present to the organization, so one has been developed. This letter explains the course to a potential site preceptor, and it briefly introduces the responsibilities of the site and preceptor, which I will explain in further detail in another slide. A PDF of the letter is available by visiting the Field Placement Site Selection webpage. If you are emailing the organization, you might incorporate the letter as a link or attachment. If you are meeting in person, you could always bring along a copy.

When you contact the organization, make sure to properly introduce yourself and the field placement course. Provide the organization with information about your education. If it is applicable, you may want to note specific courses you have taken. Share your work, educational, volunteer, and personal experience. Highlight your skills, and identify your goals. If you are emailing, you may want to attach your resume or CV for further information.

You should also describe what the field placement course is and how the organization would be involved. Provide them with the same information we have been discussing. The field placement course involves a service learning project, and you are required to work with an organization that supports public health. You have to work on a project the organization has identified as a need, and you have to create a product of worth for that organization. (Remember, strictly volunteering will not meet the course requirements.) You should also mention that you have to complete a specified number of hours on the project.

The number of hours you complete on your project depends on the number of credits you enroll in. If you enroll in 2 credits of field placement, you will need to complete at least 80 hours on your project. If you enroll in 3 credits, you will need to complete at least 120 hours, and if you enroll in 4 credits, you will need to complete at least 160 hours. In special circumstances, which must be approved by the program director, you may be able to enroll in 5 or 6 credits, which would require 200 and 240 hours, respectively.

It is important to note that not all of the hours need to be completed physically on site. You need to spend sufficient time on site to learn how a public health organization operates, but you do not need to spend all of your time there. The hours do, however, need to be on project work, not course work. If you are completing a report or paper for your <u>organization</u>, it would be considered project work. However, if you are writing a log or paper for the <u>course</u>, then it would not be considered project work and, therefore, would not count towards the minimum hours required.

When you are communicating with the organization, make sure to also describe your interests. If you are contacting them about this opportunity, you probably already know a little, or maybe a lot, about the organization. At the very least, you should have reviewed the organization's website, so you might know about the projects they work on. If you are interested in a particular project or program, make sure to let them know. If you are not sure which specific area you are most interested in, just tell them you would like to find out more information about their organization.

You should also indicate your availability. If you work from 6am until 6pm every day and are unable to take time off during those hours, then you should let the organization know up front. Many organizations that support public health work outside normal business hours and, as I just discussed in the last slide, you do not need to complete all of your hours physically on site, so you will still be able to find opportunities. However, you need to find a project and organization that will fit your schedule.

Please keep in mind, your initial communication with the organization serves several purposes. First, you want to find out whether this is the type of organization with which you would like to conduct your field placement. Second, you are trying to convince the organization that you are a good person to work with and that you will add value to their organization. The interest and benefits need to be bidirectional such that the project benefits both parties. You need to have that good "fit" to have a good project because you are going to spend a lot of time working with this organization and with your site preceptor.

When community organizations ask me why they should host students and how it will benefit them, I describe you as free, skilled labor. I highlight that the master's level students I work with have a lot of skills, and they are independent workers. Most of the organizations you will work with do not have sufficient funds to pay students, so do not get your hopes up. If an organization wanted, or was required, to compensate you financially, that discussion would be strictly between you and them. I would not be involved in any way, and neither would the MPH program or the Medical College. I am mentioning this aspect of the field placement in the initial communication section because the organization might ask if they are expected to pay you. If the question comes up, you should feel free to answer it. However, I do not recommend making it one of the first questions you ask when you are seeking additional information about organizations.

(In case you are wondering, the picture on this slide shows two donkeys cooperating and working together to scratch each others' itches. It is meant to refer to the bidirectional initial communication you will have and the mutually beneficial project you will develop. It is not meant to make any comments about individuals who think they will be financially compensated for their field placement.)

# Recruiting a Preceptor

* Discuss need for Site Preceptor
    * On-site mentor/supervisor
    * Experience in project area
    * Resource
* Resources for Preceptors
    * Program Coordinator
        * Attend meeting
        * Contact info
    * Explanatory PPT

I mentioned a few slides ago that you should introduce the field placement course to the organization you are interested in working with. After your initial information exchange, either via email or over the phone, you should provide further details. Once again, it would be best if this meeting occurred in person, but I understand that may not be possible. At this more in-depth informational meeting, you should indicate your need of a site preceptor.

As you may recall from the first presentation, the site preceptor will be your on-site mentor or supervisor. This person does not need to have an advanced degree in public health; however, he or she must have experience in the area of your project. Your site preceptor will act as a resource and should be available to answer questions or provide assistance on a regular basis. Since you will be working so closely with this person, he or she will need to have substantial time to spend with you. Oftentimes, the most senior person at an organization offers to mentor students, but if he or she does not have sufficient time to spend with you, it will not work out well. In that case, you would be better off to work with a more junior level individual who has more time to interact with you. However, if the senior level person has the time to spend with you, they will be able to offer a lot of worthwhile advice.

There are a number of resources available to your site preceptor. The first and foremost is me. I will work closely with this individual to make sure he or she understands and accepts the responsibilities of the role. If possible, I would love to be part of your in-depth information meeting with a potential site. If I am there, I can describe the site preceptor role and provide expertise regarding the field placement course, in general. I am available for in-person meetings around southeastern Wisconsin, and I can participate in phone conferences for those who are farther away.

If I am not able to attend the meeting, please make sure to give your potential site preceptor my contact information and let them know that I am available for questions or concerns at any time. Additionally, you may want to provide your potential site preceptor with a field placement handbook that has been designed specifically for them or direct them to the site preceptor explanatory presentation. You can access these PDFs by visiting the field placement website. The MPH Field Placement Site Preceptor Handbook is available on the Field Placement Forms webpage under the second section, which is entitled Site Preceptors, and the presentation is available on the Field Placement Explanatory Presentations webpage. It is the last one, which is entitled Information for Site Preceptors.

## Site & Preceptor Responsibilities

* Before you may start your project
  * Submit field placement site application & affiliation agreement
  * Develop and approve proposal
* During your field placement
  * Provide orientation & resources
  * Participate in midpoint review
* At end of your field placement
  * Participate in exit interview
  * Complete evaluation form

You will not be directly involved in ensuring your site preceptor fulfills his or her responsibilities.  However, it is important for you to know what he or she is supposed to be doing, especially because you will not be able to start working on your project until your site preceptor completes the required planning responsibilities.

Before you may start your project, the site preceptor, or another representative at the site, must submit a site application, which includes the site preceptor's resume or CV, as well as an affiliation agreement, which is a legal document.  I will provide more details regarding these documents in the next presentation.  Your site preceptor will also play an important role in developing your proposal.  As I mentioned in the first presentation, you will work closely with your site preceptor, faculty advisor, and me during that process.

Once you have been approved to start working on your project, your site preceptor should orient you to the organization by sharing the organization's mission, vision, and services.  He or she should also ensure you have the resources necessary to complete your project.  If you need access to data or to get in touch with someone, your site preceptor should help you with that.  You will develop your schedule of hours with your site preceptor, and you two should meet on a regular basis.  Group meetings involving all four members of the field placement team will occur at least twice:  once at the midpoint and again at the end of your field placement.  Your site preceptor will also be required to complete an evaluation form regarding you and your project at the end of your field placement.
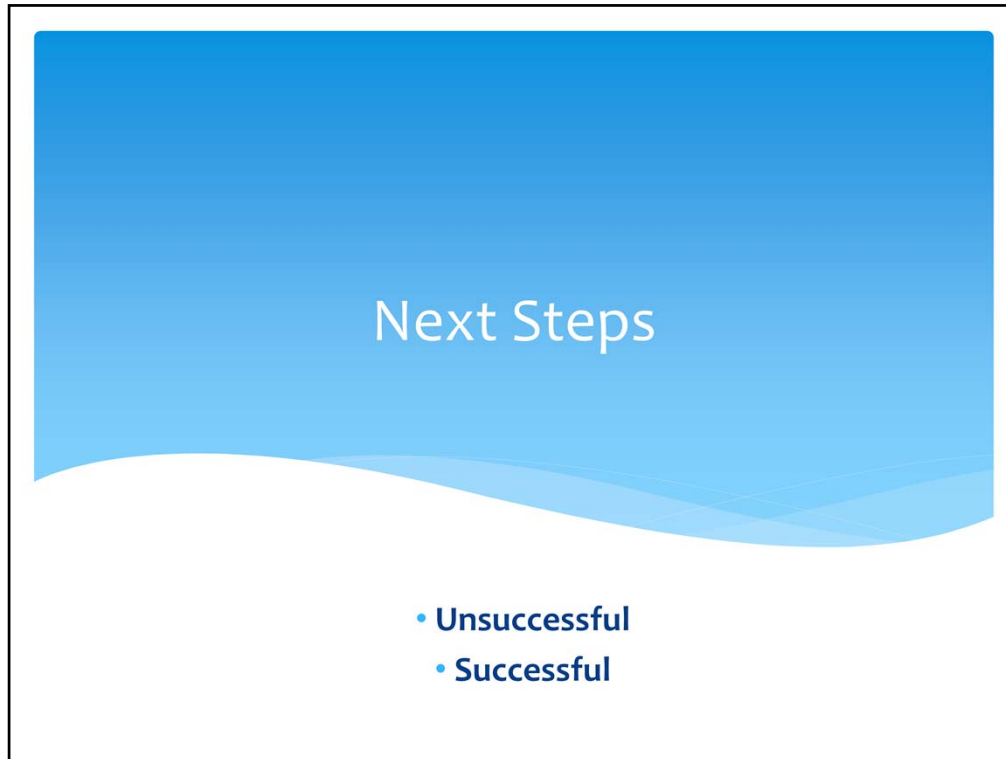
In this final section, I will discuss your next steps.  Whether you successfully recruited a field placement site or not, I will explain how to proceed.

After Contact - Lack of Success

* Organization uninterested
    * Never heard back?  Contact again.
    * Think won't be useful?  Counsel.
    * Insufficient time/personnel?  Maybe next time.
* You're uninterested / unable
    * Re-evaluate interests
    * Brainstorm again
* Identify barriers
    * Contact me
* Contact another organization

If the first organization you contacted did not work out, that is okay.  You have a few weeks to identify a site and develop a project, so you have time to contact multiple organizations.  But first, let us consider some of the issues you may have encountered.

If you never heard back from someone, you could send a second email or make another phone call.  However, if you have contacted the individual twice and they have not responded, then it is time to consider other opportunities.  If you contacted an organization and they are not interested in hosting students, that is okay.  Some mistakenly think they will have to put in a lot of time and effort without getting anything out of it.  In that case, you can try to gently reassure them that you will be very useful; however, you should not push the issue, and they still might not be interested.  Other organizations very legitimately do not have sufficient time or personnel to host a student.  Remember, the organization has to put notable effort into arranging a project you can work on.  They have to make sure you have the resources you need and that they have a site preceptor to work with you.  Sometimes it is just not feasible for an organization at a particular point in time.

If, after communicating with the organization, you discovered that your schedules did not match or you were not interested in working with them, carefully re-consider your availability, interests, and potential sites.  When are you available?  What organizations work during those hours?  Are the sites you initially thought you were interested in still of interest?  If so, you could contact another one you have already discovered.  If not, you should go back to the brainstorming stage.  Re-consider your professional and personal contacts, and, if you need to, conduct another web search to identify different types of organizations.

If none of these issues are the problem, try to identify the barriers to success. It might be a simple issue that could readily be fixed.  Did you contact the correct individual at the organization?  Did you highlight the skills you could offer them?  Remember, I am here to provide advice and assist you, so please tell me about your challenges.  We can work together to identify organizations and projects that will work for you.

Finally, do not hesitate to contact another organization.  Just because the first did not work out does not mean the next will not.  As we discussed earlier in this presentation, it is very important to find a good "fit" between you and your site . . . and that can take time.  Be patient, and do not give up.

After Contact -
Success

Congratulations!

Next Step
   Develop a project

If, on the other hand, your communication with the organization went really well, congratulations!  The next step is to collaboratively develop a project with that organization, and this process is explained in the next presentation.

**Questions?**

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As always, if you have any questions or concerns, do not hesitate to contact me.  I look forward to hearing about the organizations you are considering working with.