



# SUCCESS STORIES: PUBLIC HEALTH LABORATORY AMBASSADORS PROGRAM OPENS STUDENTS' EYES TO PUBLIC HEALTH LABORATORIES

As part of the Enhancing Public Health Laboratory Capabilities and Increase Capacity (ECIC) cooperative agreement with the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Public Health Laboratory Ambassadors Program was created by the Emerging Leader Program's Cohort 16 in 2023. The program is now fully operationalized under the Academic Partnerships team at the Association of Public Health Laboratories (APHL). The Academic Partnerships Program focuses on establishing and sustaining collaborative relationships between public health laboratories (PHLs) and academic institutions.

The [Public Health Laboratory Ambassadors Program](#) helps contribute to the overarching goals of APHL by promoting careers in public health laboratory science. Ambassadors do this by engaging with students and community members through local outreach activities, including community events, conferences, career fairs, and laboratory tours.

## Building Momentum: Volunteers from Across the Country

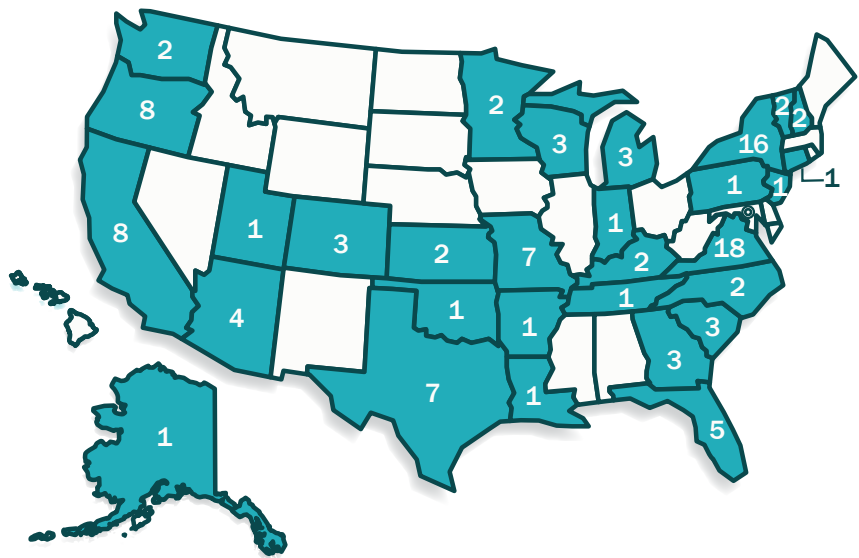
Currently, there are 116 ambassadors representing 32 states or territories. As of January 2025, the ambassadors had participated in over 60 events.

Although the program is early in its lifecycle, this local community engagement approach shows positive initial outcomes.

## Inspiring the Future: Engaging Young Minds

Rachel Zinner, the assistant director of the Kentucky State Public Health Laboratory, highlighted the importance of engaging students at a younger age to introduce them to the diverse career opportunities available in science. She shared her experience from participating in a Career Day with eighth graders, where she brought personal protective equipment (PPE) and media plates to the school.

### Distribution of Public Health Laboratory Ambassadors Across the US



“The students started asking questions and got so excited about putting on the PPE and pretending they were actually streaking something on the plates. It was amazing to see how engaged they were,” Zinner said.

She added that the experience was so well-received that she has been invited back to speak again this spring.



## Innovative Outreach: Crafting Strategies to Fit Local Needs

Ambassador Kayleen Slade, a chemist in the Newborn Screening Laboratory at the Washington State Public Health Laboratories, exemplifies the potential the outreach the Public Health Laboratory Ambassadors Program can have on an individual. One way Slade engages with her community as an ambassador is through the Expanding Your Horizons conference, an annual science, technology, engineering, arts and math event for middle school-aged girls. Slade attended the conference herself when she was in middle school and describes the experience as “really rewarding.”

Being an ambassador has shown her that “there is not a lack of interest or lack of ability in [public health laboratory sciences] but it’s about engaging people in the right way.” This past year Slade was also able to bring a student into the



Oregon State Public Health Laboratory Ambassadors at the Girl Scouts regional STEM fair

Washington State Public Health Laboratory to shadow her. “With my current role in public health, it is kind of our duty to spread the word.”

The Oregon State Public Health Laboratory, a member of the Public Health Laboratory Ambassadors program, exemplifies the principles of APHL’s Academic Partnerships program. They use the Ambassadors program to help with their goal of enhancing their workforce. Akiko Saito, the Oregon PHL business director, spoke about how they work with local schools “to get [students] inspired and educated on what it looks like to be in the PHL workforce.” Saito stressed the importance of reaching young people in a positive way and getting them excited about what PHLs do.

These are just some of the ways APHL’s Public Health Laboratory Ambassadors have engaged with the community to promote and inspire the future workforce on public health laboratory careers. This community engagement approach, which utilizes the passion and expertise of the current public health laboratory workforce, is invaluable in creating the next generation of our public health laboratory scientists.