

Evaluation of APTR-CDC Public Health Fellowship Program

Conducted on Behalf of:
**The Association for Prevention Teaching and Research &
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

By Hart Research Associates

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I. Introduction

This report highlights the major findings of a survey conducted among former APTR-CDC fellows. Following are the survey's major findings:

- Fellows overwhelmingly are satisfied with the Fellowship experience, with 96% saying they were satisfied, including 67% who were very satisfied.
- The Fellowship had a profound impact on their career development, with 88% of fellows strongly agreeing that the Fellowship experience was valuable to their career development.
- The Fellowship strengthened their commitment to public health (78% strongly agree with this statement.)
- The mentor/mentee relationship was an important part of the Fellowship. Eighty-six percent (86%) of fellows say that their relationship with their mentor had a positive impact on their Fellowship experience and 88% were satisfied with their mentor. This satisfaction is demonstrated by the 85% of fellows who now serve as mentors themselves.
- Fellows believe that they developed many invaluable skills throughout the program, such as using quantitative data, communicating through both oral and written media, and working together in teams in various roles.
- Nearly all fellows were satisfied with APTR's administration of the Fellowship, and particularly with its efficiency of operations and communications when fellows had questions. Fellows were less satisfied with APTR's involvement with mentors and organizing networking or social opportunities.
- Nearly all (96%) fellows believe that the Fellowship experience influenced their subsequent professional decisions, including 65% who say the Fellowship had a strong influence.
- Many fellows agree that the Fellowship experience made them want to pursue a career in governmental public health (76%) and specifically at CDC (76%).
- Not only has the Fellowship encouraged fellows to pursue employment in governmental public health, but many have continued at CDC. After the APTR-CDC Fellowship was completed, three in five (60%) fellows have been employed by CDC either as an FTE, contractor, or trainee and among those 73% are currently employed by CDC.
- Employment at CDC is not a short-term choice for most, with 80% having been employed at CDC for six years or more.
- Not only are fellows very satisfied with the program and believe it has been profoundly important to their career development, but they would overwhelmingly recommend that recent graduates of public health programs participate in the Fellowship—with 81% strongly recommending that they participate.

II. Methodology

From October 16 to December 4, 2015, Hart Research Associates conducted an online survey of alumni from the Association for Prevention Teaching and Research (APTR)-Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Fellowship Program. The purpose of the research was to evaluate the program's impact as well as alumni attitudes toward the program.

Working from a list compiled by APTR of 218 fellows, Hart Research sent an e-mail invitation to all fellows with an e-mail address. Over the course of the survey field period fellows received three reminder e-mails and four reminder phone calls for all fellows with phone numbers.

From the initial list of 218 fellows, 181 had working e-mail addresses (defined as those that did not bounce back messages) or were successfully contacted by phone and were potentially able to receive the invitation to participate in the survey. The remaining 37 fellows either had no e-mail address available or had an e-mail address that bounced back. Of the 181 fellows, a total of 107 participated in the survey, while 57 did not respond to the e-mail invitations or answer the phone calls, and 17 were reached by phone or clicked on the link to participate, but chose not to participate. We have no way of knowing whether those 57 fellows ever received information about the survey. So, of the 124 fellows whom Hart Research can confirm actually received the invitation, 107 participated in the survey. This means that the participation rate for fellows who definitely received an invitation is 86%.

In addition, senior-level staff at Hart Research conducted six in-depth telephone interviews with fellows who completed the program since 2001.

III. APTR-CDC Fellow Profile

Demographically, fellows are much more likely to be women than men, and nearly half of fellows are now in their 40s. Two in three (67%) fellows are white, while significant proportions are black or African American (14%), Asian (10%), or Hispanic or Latino (8%).

Demographic Profile of APTR-CDC Fellows¹	
	%
Men	26
Women	68
25-34	8
35-39	15
40-44	25
45-49	22
50 and over	24
White	67
Black/African American	14
Asian	10
Hispanic or Latino	8

The Fellowship experience has had a profound impact on many who participated in the program, and one clear example of this is that many have stayed in the Atlanta area. More than three in four (78%) fellows were placed in Atlanta. While APTR-CDC Fellowship alumni live across the United States and around the world, nearly two in five (39%) fellows live in Georgia.

Fellowships took place in a variety of centers, institutes, and offices, with 29% in HIV/AIDS prevention and 19% in Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion.

¹ Percentages do not add to 100% due to some respondents refusing to answer these questions.

Fellowship Site

HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, TB Prevention	29%
Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion	19%
Occupational Safety and Health	8%
Health Statistics	8%
Injury Prevention and Control	8%
Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases	6%
Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities	4%
Environmental Health/ATSDR	2%
Immunization and Respiratory Diseases	2%
Surveillance, Epidemiology, and Laboratory Services	2%
Office of the Director	2%
State, Tribal, Local and Territorial Support	1%
Other	9%

The vast majority of fellows completed their Fellowship position (78%), while 22% indicate that they left before completing the Fellowship. A majority (54%) of Fellowships were for two years (45%) or more than two years (9%). More than two in five (43%) Fellowships lasted for one year (27%) or between one and two years (16%), while just 3% of fellows report that their Fellowship was less than one year in duration.

Currently, the advanced degrees most commonly held by fellows are PhDs (50%), MPHs/MSPHs (41%), and MDs/DOs (16%).

Advanced Degrees Held by APTR-CDC Fellows²

	<u>%</u>
PhD	50
MPH or MSPH	41
MD or DO	16
MS	5
DrPH	4
MA	3
DVM	2
MSN	2
DNP	1
MBA	1
MPP or MPA	1
MUPP	1
SCD	1

² Percentages do not add to 100% due to some respondents refusing to answer these questions.

Those holding doctoral degrees are most likely to hold a board certification in internal medicine, preventive medicine, or OB/GYN.

Nearly all fellows (96%) have been published in a peer-reviewed journal, with an impressive two-thirds (66%) of those publications coming as a direct result of the research they conducted while participating in the APTR-CDC program.

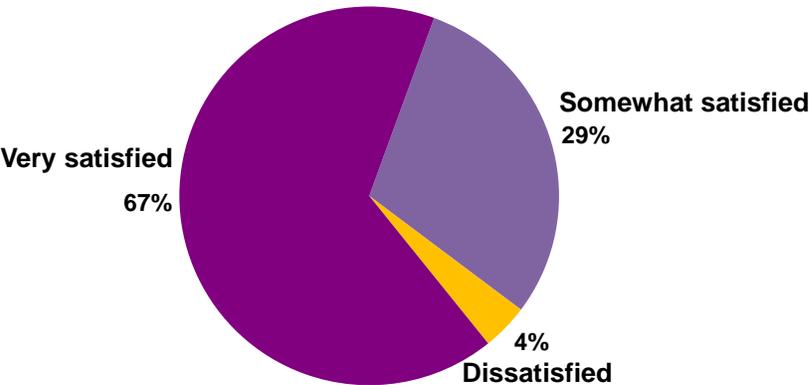
Nearly half (48%) of fellows say that they have held a public health leadership position since completing the Fellowship.

IV. Fellowship Experience

Fellows are overwhelmingly satisfied with their experience and believe that the program was valuable to their career development. They also are very satisfied with their mentors and believe they had a positive impact on their development. The Fellowship has a very positive impact on the development of various skills, particularly communicative, analytical, and teamwork/teambuilding skills, which are still important to fellows in their current positions.

Nearly all (96%) survey respondents report that they were satisfied with their experiences as part of the APTR-CDC Fellowship program, with 67% saying that they were very satisfied.

Satisfaction with Fellowship



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The program exposed fellows to issue areas and professional networks that have had positive and lasting impacts on their careers. Consider that:

- 88% strongly agree that their participation in the program was valuable to their career development.
- 69% strongly agree that the training they received is directly related to their current professional endeavors.

Their own words highlight the profound impact that the Fellowship continues to have on them:

"It was an opportunity to get out of academia and see how public health at a national level was practiced. VERY crucial part of my education. It also allowed me to make great contacts."

"Provided unique, hands-on experience that I could not obtain during my graduate studies. An extremely rewarding experience that provided me with skills and opportunities that still pay dividends 15 years later."

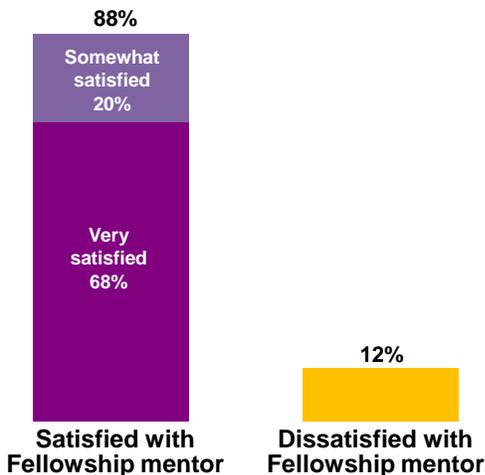
"I was given amazing opportunities, and it opened the door to my career (I've been at CDC for 13 years now!)"

"Life-changing—I would not be in the career I'm in now without this Fellowship."

"I received excellent training and was exposed to opportunities and people who have had a lasting positive effect on my career."

In addition to the valuable knowledge and experience the Fellowship provided, many alumni credit their mentors with making the program valuable and meaningful. Overall, 88% of alumni report that they were satisfied with their mentors, with 68% saying they were very satisfied. And alumni who were very satisfied with their mentors are more likely to say they were very satisfied with the Fellowship program overall (86%).

Satisfaction with Mentor



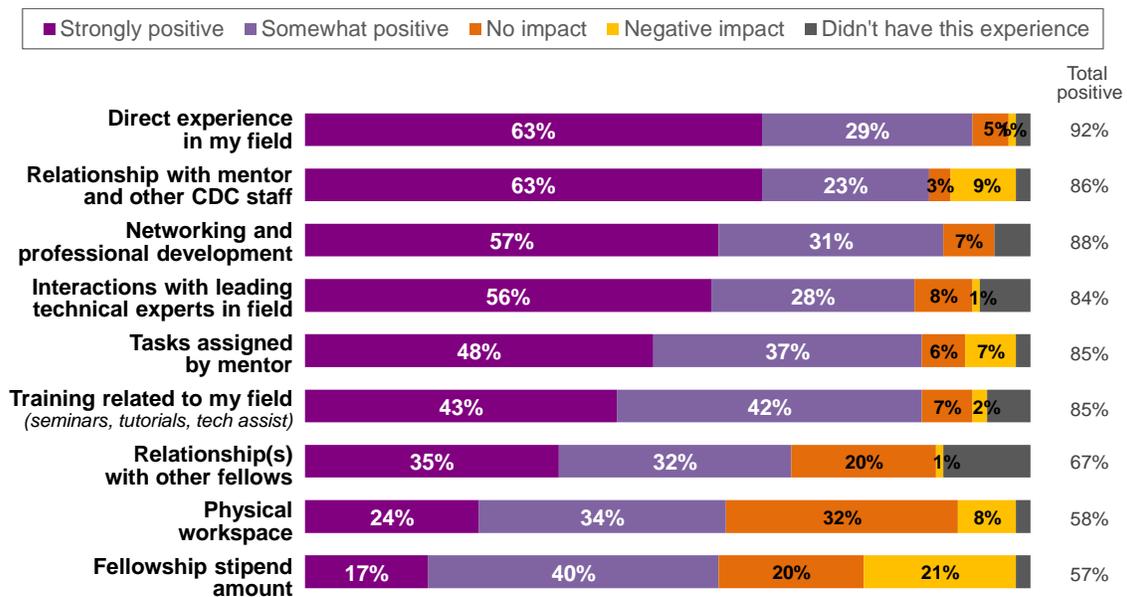
While few (4%) respondents indicate dissatisfaction with the program, among those who offered examples of the experience's shortcomings, the most common source of dissatisfaction was their mentor. These alumni report that their mentors were not as helpful as expected or were simply unavailable to provide guidance or assistance when needed.

Clearly the overwhelming majority of fellows had a positive mentor experience and this really does affect not just their Fellowship experience, but also the direction that their career path will take after the Fellowship. Several fellows explain that the best qualities that a mentor can have include:

- That the mentor is inclusive, and treats the fellows as FTEs and gives them access and responsibilities to really experience what CDC has to offer.
- That the mentor works closely with the fellow and allows them to learn and make mistakes in a positive working environment.

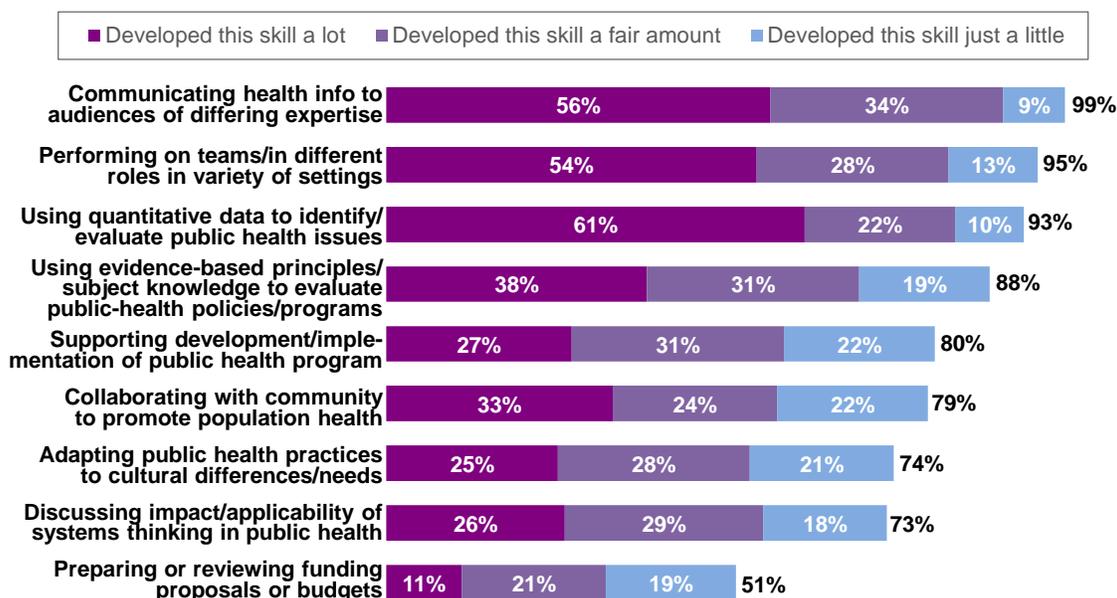
In keeping with the above findings, fellows report that direct experience in their field of interest and their relationship with their mentor had the greatest positive impact on their Fellowship experience. The professional networks they built and the opportunity to interact with leading experts also have strong positive effects on how they view their Fellowship experience.

Impact of Fellowship Aspects



During their time as fellows, the majority of respondents also had the opportunity to develop the competencies APTR identified as necessary for success. For example: 99% of fellows developed health communication skills by delivering information to audiences of varying expertise orally and in writing; 93% developed their quantitative assessment skills by using data to identify and evaluate health issues; and 95% developed their professional interpersonal skills by working in teams in different roles and settings.

Skills Developed during Fellowship



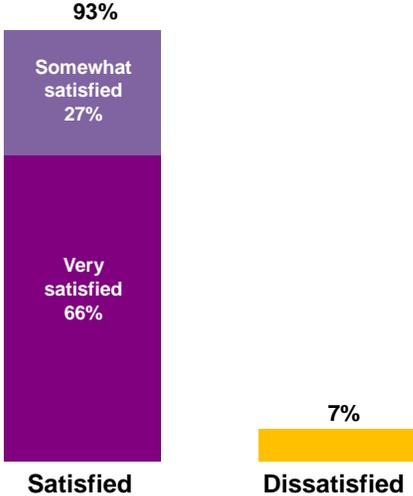
Perhaps more importantly, for nearly four in five (78%) fellows their participation in the program strengthened their commitment to public health—one of the primary goals of the Fellowship program. Furthermore, most of the respondents who say the program did not reinforce their commitment to public health explain that they entered the program already having a strong commitment to the discipline and not because of any experience in the program.

V. APTR Fellowship Administration

Fellows are satisfied with APTR’s administration of the Fellowship, particularly the efficiency of operations and communications of the Fellowship. Fellows are somewhat less satisfied with APTR’s guidance with mentors and networking opportunities provided by APTR.

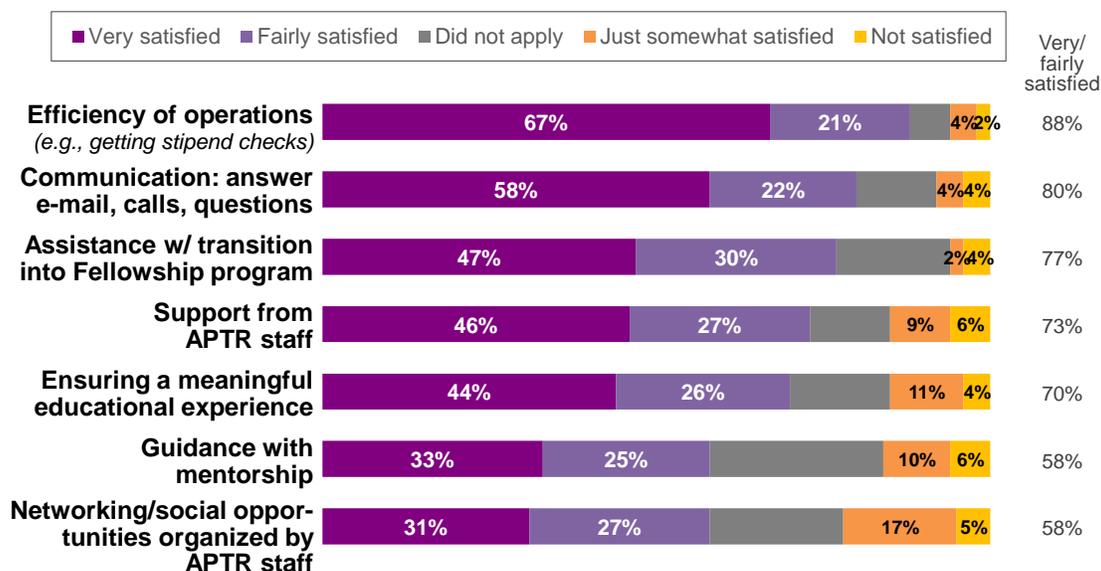
Nearly all (93%) program alumni report that they were satisfied overall with APTR’s administration of the Fellowship program; two in three say they were very satisfied.

Satisfaction with APTR Administration of Fellowship



When it comes to specific areas of administration, two-thirds (67%) of alumni say they were very satisfied with the efficiency of APTR’s operations, including disbursing stipends and reimbursement for travel, and 58% say they were very satisfied with the communication and responsiveness of APTR staff. Significant majorities of alumni also were satisfied with the orientation they received and efforts by APTR to ensure they had meaningful educational experiences.

Satisfaction with APTR Administration in Selected Areas



Fellows describe their interactions with APTR staff in their own words:

"Things went very smoothly, I don't recall any administrative snafus during this two year Fellowship. The coordination of meetings with other fellows and people at CDC, and facilitation of my temporary Fellowship on site at CDC in 2003, as well as the disbursement of my salary, were all very smooth."

"I was matched with an appropriate mentor, given adequate orientation, and compensated at a level that was appropriate at the time."

"All necessary aspects of my Fellowship were clearly explained and handled in a professional and timely manner."

"Staff members were always very responsive to my needs; systems and processes were clear and easy to follow."

The areas in which alumni report being less satisfied are APTR’s guidance with the mentorship and organization of networking and social opportunities. However, fellows are still generally satisfied with both aspects and neither appears to be a major factor in their assessment of the program overall and are not correlated with their evaluation of their experience, nor are they among the top suggestions as to how to improve the program.

Nearly one in three alumni reports that during their Fellowship, they had no regular contact with other CDC fellows. For some fellows this type of interaction is important while for others it is not, and in fact, what we heard in the interviews is that this really comes down to personal preference. In placing fellows in the future, it might be worthwhile to consider their feelings toward working with other fellows.

The most common suggestion alumni offer to improve APTR's administration is to check in with the fellows more regularly (14%) and more frequently (9%). Other suggestions reflect the importance of the role mentors play—5% suggest that APTR provide better or more experienced mentors with another 5% suggesting that there be more mentors available. Still, none of these suggestions are mentioned in large numbers and this, again, reflects the fact that overall satisfaction with APTR's administration of the Fellowship is very high.

VI. Impact of Fellowship

For most fellows, the program had a profound and lasting impact on their career development. Most have continued to work in government service and in the public health field upon the completion of their Fellowship. And many continue to work at CDC, where they have worked for years. Not only were most fellows very satisfied with their mentor and believe this relationship was a very important part of their own development, but a sizable majority of fellows have served as mentors to others. And most fellows would recommend the Fellowship to a recent graduate of a public health program.

Nearly all respondents believe that the Fellowship influenced their subsequent professional decisions. Ninety-six percent (96%) report that their future decisions were influenced by the Fellowship, including 65% who say the Fellowship had a strong influence.

Influence of Fellowship on Career

My experience in the APTR/CDC Fellowship program has influenced my subsequent professional decisions



My experience in the APTR/CDC Fellowship program has NOT influenced my subsequent professional decisions



Looking at what fellows actually say makes it clear how important the Fellowship experience has been to them both personally and professionally. For many, it has not only strongly influenced their professional development, but also has given them strong and often lasting relationships with their mentors and others at CDC.

"My Fellowship experience confirmed my desire to become a full-time CDC employee and work to address public health issues at a national level. I began my CDC tenure as an FTE immediately following my Fellowship experience, and have been with the agency for almost 15 years."

"Being in the Fellowship was a tremendous opportunity to get my foot in the door at CDC. I became familiar with the agency and its culture, and the experience I gained helped me to get a contract position at CDC, which led to a federal position. All told, I was at CDC for 12 years, and I still work for the federal government today. Taking part in the Fellowship program was an essential step in my federal career."

"I learned that I loved public health and wanted to make that a career. I also made good CDC colleagues, who I am in contact with to this day."

Specifically, large majorities agree with the following statements based upon their experience at CDC:

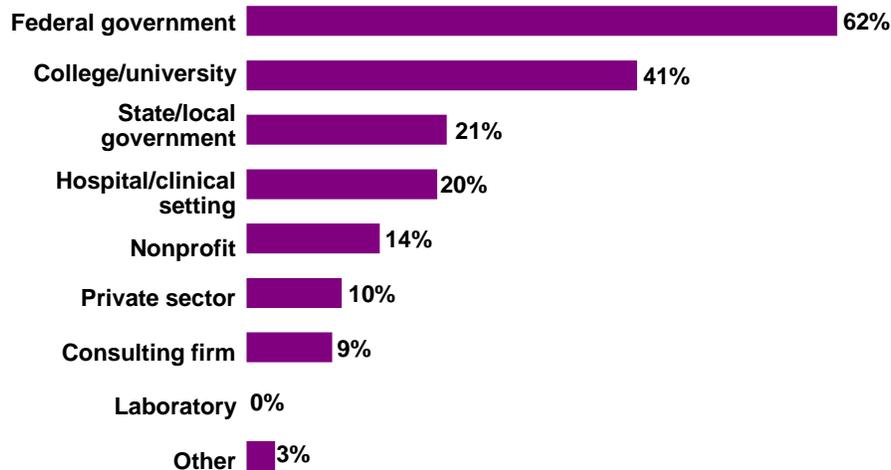
- 87% agree that the experience made me want to become a mentor to others.
- 76% agree that the experience made me want to pursue a career in governmental public health.
- 76% agree that the experience made me want to work for the CDC.

Clearly, the Fellowship experience not only allows these fellows a foot in the door at CDC that they otherwise would not have, but once they complete the Fellowship, the experience leaves them wanting to continue in the field of public health and serve as mentor to others. It is worth noting that the only such statement that fellows mostly disagree with is, "The experience made me want to pursue another degree in the field of public health" (67%). Given their overwhelmingly positive reactions to the Fellowship and the experience that they gained from it, it is not a leap to posit that many feel that the Fellowship itself was equivalent to a graduate degree and gave them the firm footing that they needed to continue their career in public health.

Not only do fellows feel that the program made them want to pursue a career in public health, but that is actually what they were most likely to pursue. Fully 61% of fellows pursued employment in governmental public health immediately following the Fellowship, and another 7% pursued a position in non-governmental public health. Roughly one in five (22%) pursued employment in academia, and while most fellows did not say that the experience made them want to pursue another degree, 19% chose this career path after the Fellowship. And for that subset, 62% say that their Fellowship experience was a significant or somewhat significant factor in this decision.

It is also noteworthy that more than four in five fellows have served in government service, either at the federal (62%) or state/local government level (21%) since completing their Fellowship. Many fellows also took jobs at colleges or universities after finishing the Fellowship (41%), but it is important to note how many fellows have continued their government service post-Fellowship.

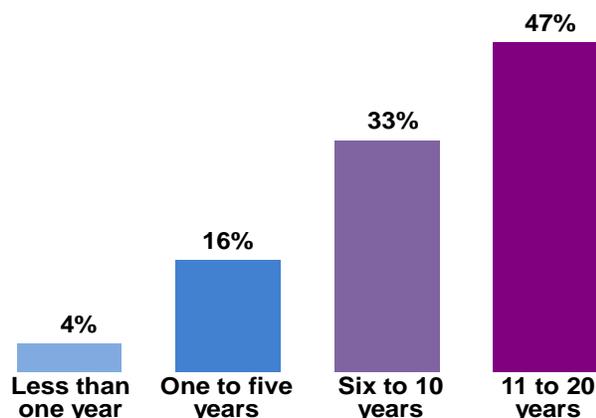
Post-Fellowship Employment



Focusing on CDC specifically, 65% of fellows report that they were offered either a permanent (32%) or temporary (33%) position at CDC or another government agency immediately following their Fellowship, with 66% indicating that the position was offered at CDC. Moreover, not only were most fellows offered a position, but since their Fellowship fully 60% of fellows have been employed by CDC as an FTE, contractor, or trainee. And among those who have been employed by CDC, 73% are currently working at CDC. This is significant, because many of the fellows completed the program years ago, which means that their connection to CDC is not fleeting, but is often a career-long connection that began because of the Fellowship. Consider that of the fellows who have been employed by CDC, 80% have been employed for six years or more, with nearly half (47%) working at CDC for more than 10 years.

Length of Employment at CDC

Those who say they have been employed by CDC report that they are/were employed by CDC for:



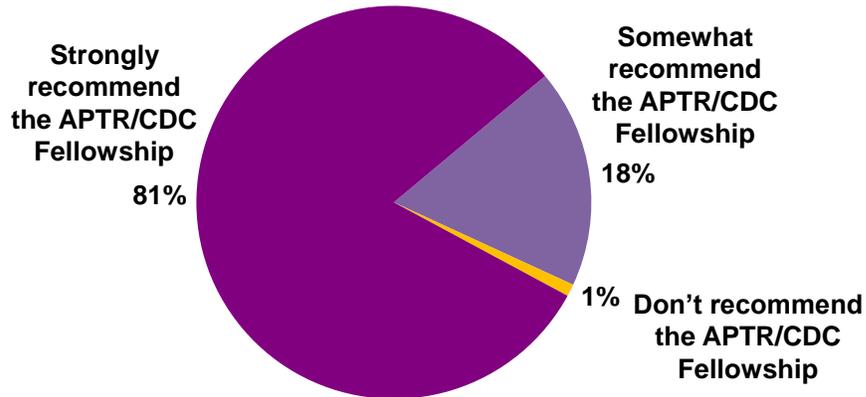
An examination of fellows' career trajectories underscores the lasting impact of the Fellowship. Eighty-one percent of fellows say that their current position is related at least somewhat to their Fellowship role(s), including 60% who say directly (32%) or fairly related (28%). Mentoring also matters here, with 70% of those who were very satisfied with their mentor in a position directly or fairly related to their Fellowship experience.

On that point, not only do fellows place a great deal of importance on their mentor's role in shaping their Fellowship experience, but they also see the importance in giving back and serving as mentors themselves. Fully 87% said the Fellowship experience made them want to become a mentor to others and 85% of fellows have acted as a mentor for a public health trainee, including 57% who have done so in a formal capacity.

In many ways, the most important and telling evaluation of the Fellowship experience is whether fellows would recommend the program to someone like them—a recent graduate of a public health program. And here, the answer is a resounding yes. Reflecting back on their time as fellows, 99% would recommend the program to recent public health graduates, with 81% saying they would strongly recommend it.

Fellowship Recommended to Others

Would you recommend the APTR/CDC Fellowship to recent graduates of public health programs and health professions?



Fellows describe the impact of the program in their own words:

"Opportunity to work at CDC, the world's largest and most influential public health agency. Have the opportunity to work with, and provide data to, public health officials. Such is not a commonly found opportunity."

"A great way to get post-graduate experience and your foot in the door in public health. In fact, I just recommended it to a school of public health brown bag seminar about career paths in public health that I was speaking to yesterday at the University of Louisville and I did the same talk at University of Kentucky last week."

"It will give them a great opportunity to start their career in public health, to learn a lot, and to formulate their career goals and directions for the future."

"Opportunity! Sometimes it is just access, someone making an effort to open a door, get someone's application considered and then Voila! Talent, Thinkers, New Ideas, and classic good ones are discovered/rediscovered..."

Survey results demonstrate that the APTR-CDC Fellowship Program is successful on many fronts. The program is achieving its mission of strengthening fellows' commitment to public health and fostering an interest in governmental public health careers while providing participants with highly satisfying professional development opportunities. The survey reveals that the vast majority of fellows have continued on a career path in public health, which for many has meant a long tenure at CDC. Findings also provide insight into the importance of the mentorship

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aspect of the program. The data provide important feedback for APTR as well. Fellows feel favorable about their overall experience, including APTR's administration of the Fellowship. These results can be utilized to inform continuous improvement efforts and establish a baseline for APTR and CDC to measure, track, and evaluate programmatic changes over time.