



Laying the Foundation for a Stronger Public Health Data and Technology Workforce

**Year One: From Rapid Response to
Resilient Infrastructure**

**A year of accelerating innovation, supporting new talent and
laying the pathway for a sustainable public health tech workforce**

The CDC Foundation | Updated: June 30, 2025 | Reporting Period: July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025

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Executive Summary

Nationwide, many public health systems must function with outdated technologies and disjointed information systems. Improving these systems requires updated technologies, new policies and additional skilled technical professionals at all levels of public health.

The Workforce Acceleration Initiative (WAI) focuses on meeting the data and technology workforce needs of the nation's public health agencies/authorities (PHAs) by providing additional data and technology experts to accelerate information systems improvements (ISIs).

Across 49 state, Tribal, local and territorial (STLT) PHAs serving more than 126 million people, WAI placed over 120 full-time data and technology professionals — 91% from outside public health — to help modernize outdated systems, improve interoperability and strengthen data infrastructure. By combining private-sector expertise with public-sector missions, WAI is proving that people are the most powerful driver of modernization.

Year One Progress: From Rapid Response to Resilient Infrastructure

In its first year, WAI evolved from a rapid response effort into a resilient, insight-driven infrastructure that supports a growing, skilled public health data and technology workforce. The CDC Foundation WAI team established a strong foundation that equipped participating PHAs with talent — Placements — and wraparound training and supports to accelerate public health system modernizations.

Year One focused on building capacity, forging partnerships and learning what it takes to recruit, retain and empower a new kind of public health professional. Working with two cohorts of PHAs and Placements, the team established a strong operational backbone, equipping PHAs with skilled talent and the wraparound supports needed to accelerate modernization projects aligned with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) Public Health Data Strategy (PHDS).

The initiative demonstrated that pairing private-sector recruiting practices — like tech-aligned job descriptions (JDs), competitive pay and remote work flexibility — with tailored public health onboarding and mentorship can dramatically strengthen the nation's data modernization capacity.



WAI's Two Primary Goals

1. **Enhance the public health data and technology workforce** by recruiting and retaining new talent
2. **Accelerate nationwide improvement of the information system infrastructure**

Snapshot: Key Strategies and Accomplishments



Partnering With Diverse PHAs

- **Strategy:** Engage diverse PHAs proposing efforts that build information system foundations consistent with the PHDS.
- **Accomplishments:** Selected and oriented 49 diverse STLT PHAs serving more than 126 million people nationwide.



Recruiting Rapidly

- **Strategy:** Rapidly recruit qualified candidates from outside the public health sector.
- **Accomplishments:** Filled 124 full-time Placement positions, with 91% hired from industries outside of public health. Expedited the average time to offer between Cohort One and Cohort Two by nine days (70 versus 61 days).



Onboarding and Integrating Placements

- **Strategy:** Integrate Placements with their PHA teams and the CDC Foundation using a multi-faceted onboarding strategy.
- **Accomplishments:** Onboarded 111 Placements. At 90 days, 95% of Placements reported being fully integrated into their PHA team, and 98% reported using what they learned in WAI core training in their roles.



Ensuring Success Through Training, Peer Learning and Mentorship

- **Strategy:** Increase Placement success and retention by connecting them with colleagues and public health mentors and offering robust training opportunities.
- **Accomplishments:**
 - Hosted 18 Learning Community events with more than 800 attendances.
 - Learning Community components bridged foundational training with real-world work, supported technical training and enabled ongoing knowledge sharing.
 - 94% of Placements were matched with mentors and reported feeling supported in learning, problem solving and career growth.



Accelerating PHA Success With Wraparound Supports

- **Strategy:** Accelerate PHA project progress and increase the likelihood of retaining Placements after the funding period by offering additional wraparound supports.
- **Accomplishments:** Processed 22 requests for technical assistance (TA), and completed nine requests.



Learning and Sharing Insights

- **Strategy:** Document and disseminate insights, successes, lessons learned and calls to action to inform WAI improvement and future data modernization workforce initiatives.
- **Accomplishments:**
 - Administered 13 surveys and polls across WAI components.
 - Developed and published the WAI PHA Information Infrastructure Maturity Model.
 - Reached out on 40 story leads, conducted 24 storytelling interviews and drafted 21 profile stories to capture Placement and PHA perspectives.



Snapshot: Learnings From Year One

1. Recruitment and Onboarding

- **Speed matters – but so does preparation.** Experienced technical recruiters filled human resources (HR) gaps and accelerated hiring. Using WAI's tailored JDs and interview tools, PHAs reduced hiring time by nine days between Cohorts One and Two (from 70 to 61 days).
- **Remote work expands access.** Offering flexible and remote positions allowed PHAs – especially those in rural or resource-limited areas – to access top talent they otherwise couldn't reach.
- **Cultural orientation is critical.** Placements new to public health needed structured onboarding to understand governmental systems, resource limitations and mission-driven culture.

2. Building Integration and Belonging

- **Placements found purpose and support.** After 90 days, 95% felt fully integrated into their PHA, and 98% said the WAI core training helped them succeed in their roles.
- **Mentorship builds retention.** In total, 94% of Placements were paired with mentors who supported problem solving and professional growth, reinforcing long-term interest in public health careers.





3. Learning and Community

- **Continuous learning drives success.** WAI's Learning Community hosted 18 events with over 800 attendances, helping PHAs and Placements share practices on data governance, interoperability and system design.
- **Targeted training yields impact.** Participants requested more focus on change management, user-centered design and organizational culture — needs that will be addressed in Year Two.

4. TA and Evaluation

- **Wraparound supports close capacity gaps.** TA requests helped PHAs with low informatics maturity stay on track with project milestones.
- **Monitoring builds accountability.** Automated data processes and continuous “sensemaking” sessions enabled real-time program improvements and informed decision-making.

5. Communications and Thought Leadership

- **Storytelling sustains engagement.** Embedding communications from the outset strengthened alignment, amplified WAI's visibility and generated 21 profile stories capturing PHA and Placement perspectives.
- **Workforce can serve as a modernization pillar.** WAI filled a national thought leadership gap by positioning workforce development as essential to data modernization success.



Snapshot: Progress and Impact

- The most common WAI **projects** relate to:
 - Data management and bringing datasets together (e.g., data warehouses, lakes, data linking) (N=40 PHAs with these types of projects out of 49 total PHAs)
 - Internal and external data system interoperability (N=37 of 49)
 - Improved data access and use (including data dashboards) (N=35 of 49)
- The most common **data types** addressed in WAI projects are:
 - Population health management system data (N=28 PHAs with projects addressing this data type out of 49 total PHAs)
 - Case report data (N=28 of 49)
 - Laboratory data (N=27 of 49)
- PHAs report using Placement expertise in **unexpected ways**. For example, Placements have improved collaboration and communication across PHA teams, enhanced data governance strategies and trained staff on new software, tools and methods.

Placements are also helping PHAs enhance collaboration, streamline workflows and improve data governance – often in ways that extend beyond their initial project scopes. PHAs and Placements consistently reported on-time progress toward milestones, with satisfaction exceeding 90% for most of the year. Concerns about the grant’s limited duration underscored the importance of sustainability planning, which is a major focus of Year Two.

Snapshot: Directions for Year Two

- **Deepen engagement** by offering Communities of Practice (CoPs) focused on a wider range of topics and by involving Placements in the Communities most closely aligned to their work.
- **Expand mentorship** to include “public health spotlights” — group sessions linking new technologists with experienced leaders.
- **Launch new WAI University trainings** on organizational change management and responsive technology design.
- **Conduct targeted site visits** to strengthen relationships and foster peer learning.
- **Advance sustainability planning** to help PHAs retain Placements’ expertise and maintain systems gains after the funding period.

WAI is more than a hiring program — it’s a blueprint for a stronger, more resilient public health workforce. In just one year, WAI has shown what’s possible when public health and technology talent work side by side toward a shared mission: to use data and innovation to save lives and strengthen communities.

As WAI moves into Year Two, it continues to bridge the gap between vision and capacity — helping public health not only meet today’s challenges but build the workforce to lead tomorrow.



WAI

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