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CANADIAN FIELD EPIDEMIOLOGY PROGRAM CALL FOR PLACEMENTS

COHORT 37
SEPTEMBER 2011 – AUGUST 2013

"Training through service"



The Canadian Field Epidemiology Program (CFEP) is now accepting placement applications for Cohort 37 (2011-2013). We invite you to consider whether your jurisdiction could be an appropriate Field Epidemiologist placement site.

For those of you who have never worked with the program, this document provides you with background information on the Field Epidemiologist recruitment process, as well as the criteria and expectations of placements that will best support a Field Epidemiologist. Those of you already familiar with the program and our placement recruitment process can proceed directly to the [Placement Application](#).

Unlike co-op, summer or medical students, Field Epidemiologists are full-time, salaried Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) employees. They come into the program with professional experience in public health and are seeking specialty training from CFEP in applied epidemiology that cannot be taught in a classroom or at a desk.

Field Epidemiologist Recruitment

Potential Field Epidemiologists may learn about the program through word of mouth, personal experiences working with a Field Epidemiologist, hearing about Field Epidemiologist investigations through CFEP seminars or other venues, meeting with CFEP staff and/or through our website.

Field Epidemiologists are selected through a competitive process that begins with a Call for Applicants each Fall. Candidates are initially screened on standard requirements such as work experience, citizenship and education/professional qualifications. There are two Public Service Commission classifications of Field Epidemiologists: EC and MD-MOF; the distinguishing feature is whether the employee is licensed to practice medicine in Canada – a requirement under the collective agreement for the MD-MOF Field Epidemiologists. Candidates must pass an exam, an interview and provide letters of recommendation in order to be successful in the recruitment process. We anticipate

that we will place up to 10 Field Epidemiologists for the 2011-2013 cohort.

All Field Epidemiologist positions are funded by CFEP—we do not accept external funding to create additional positions. Our rationale for fully funding Field Epidemiologist positions is that having Field Epidemiologists partly or fully paid by their placements could result in competing priorities between CFEP and the sponsoring site. Because we are ultimately responsible for the Field Epidemiologists' training, field investigation mobilizations (Epi-Aid), and other administrative and financial matters, the only way to ensure that Field Epidemiologists meet all of our requirements is to have all Field Epidemiologists fully supported by CFEP.

Placement Site Recruitment

Placement recruitment is concurrent with the recruitment of Field Epidemiologists. We actively seek both new and repeat placement sites across Canada, to include communicable and/or non-communicable disease activities, environmental health issues, animal/human health interactions, and diverse learning opportunities. We also seek placements at different levels of public health in Canada—local health units, regional health authorities, provincial/territorial ministries of health, and others, including public health agencies or university-affiliated public health organizations

Placement Criteria

To assess the suitability of a potential placement, we ask interested supervisors to complete the [Placement Application](#) to outline the technical (supervision, scope of work) and administrative (physical environment, funding, support) aspects of the proposed placement site.

In considering a placement, we assess the depth of experience of the placement supervisor(s), as well as the depth and breadth of potential placement-related activities, including access to epidemiologic data; opportunities for field investigations and surveillance projects; the supervisor's ability to provide ongoing assessment; and the nature and extent of support available to the Field Epidemiologist.

Placements should have a practical (applied epidemiology) mandate—placements focused strictly on policy or those that are research-oriented may have difficulties in identifying sufficient applied epidemiology opportunities. An appropriate placement site will have adequate technical and administrative resources as well as a range of learning and service activities to support one Field Epidemiologist for two full years.

Although PHAC is committed to strengthening Canadian public health capacity, we avoid assigning a Field Epidemiologist to a placement that really just needs more full time staff. Field Epidemiologists are not intended to be a pool of epidemiologists for local, provincial or federal public health departments. Placements must be prepared and staffed to support the training experience and goals of the CFEP. A fully staffed site provides a richer experience to the Field Epidemiologist by spreading out the responsibility for supervision and teaching, and better supporting the Field Epidemiologist's activities and decision making. This support ultimately results in the Field Epidemiologist providing the placement with better service. Field Epidemiologists will gain the most in a setting that can provide optimal technical and administrative support, which permits them to enhance their skills and knowledge.

Technical Support

There are three key areas of technical suitability:

- A. Supervision
- B. Scope of placement-related activities
- C. Other technical resources

A. Supervision

Over the years, field epidemiology training programs in many countries have found that the single most important factor in a successful assignment is the placement supervisor. The nature of supervision required for a given activity and the assigned level of responsibility will depend on the individual Field Epidemiologist and will vary over the course of the two years, but the requirement for supervision remains. We are looking for placement supervisors who are committed to training and working with

CFEP to maintain quality throughout the training period. Placements should demonstrate they can provide a stimulating learning environment in which Field Epidemiologists have good role models and mentors to guide them as they develop or enhance their public health careers.

The benefit of having a Field Epidemiologist comes at the cost of putting time into the investment. All potential supervisors should recognize that supervision of a Field Epidemiologist requires a substantial commitment of their time, energy and intellect. This supervision requires a definite commitment of at least 10% of the supervisor's time (i.e., at least 1/2 day per week for two full years). For this reason, we require placements to identify an appropriate alternate supervisor for those times when the primary supervisor is unavailable. Senior public health managers (i.e., Chief Medical Officers of Health, Directors) seldom have the time to directly supervise a Field Epidemiologist; however, we encourage their participation in ensuring that placements are suitable.

Placement supervisors and their alternates must be sufficiently competent in applied epidemiology to provide appropriate technical support to Field Epidemiologists. Supervisors should also be well established in the placement site and the broader public health community, to act as mentors. Placement supervisors new to a position/organization may not be ready to mentor a Field Epidemiologist.

The most common reason for placement inadequacy in recent years has been supervisor or staff turnover resulting in gaps in supervision and/or the loss of the Field Epidemiologist champion in the placement. While such events are not always predictable, we have modified our placement assessment to include more detail about overall placement preparedness, range of supervision and workload.

B. Scope of placement-related activities

Professional Experience Guidelines (PEGs)

Placements should identify activities to develop the Field Epidemiologist's competencies in applied epidemiology. We require all Field Epidemiologists to complete eight professional experiences (PEGs) during their two years. The PEGs encourage the development of critical competencies in epidemiologic process, communication and professionalism. These experiential expectations are similar to those used in Field Epidemiology Training Programs around the world.

The PEGs:

1. Conduct at least one field investigation of a disease outbreak or other potentially serious public health problem that requires a rapid response. This can be infectious or non-infectious in nature, and should involve direct contact with persons affected. The Field Epidemiologist will become proficient in the conduct of outbreak investigations by assuming increasing responsibility for such field studies. Second year Field Epidemiologists may have the opportunity to supervise first year Field Epidemiologists or others in the field.
2. Design, conduct, and interpret an epidemiologic analysis of a new or existing database. Make appropriate public health recommendations based on the results of the analysis. The data set should be of sufficient size and complexity to allow assessment of potential confounders or effect modifiers.
3. Surveillance Project: design and implement, OR revise and implement, OR evaluate a public health surveillance system.
4. Submit a manuscript for publication to a peer-reviewed journal.
5. Submit work for publication to a non-peer-reviewed scientific forum.
6. Give an oral presentation at a PHAC-sponsored seminar (e.g., Surveillance Workshop, CFEP Seminar series).
7. Prepare a presentation for a national or international scientific conference.
8. Respond appropriately to written or oral public health inquiries from the public, government officials, or health professionals. Participate in the preparation of ministerial briefings and responses to media inquiries.

Together, the placement supervisor and the Field Epidemiologist should establish a work plan for completing the eight PEGs. The Field Epidemiologist is also encouraged to develop and achieve personal learning objectives. In order for the Field Epidemiologist to receive adequate direction and feedback concerning his/her activities, the placement supervisor must be available, communicative, sensitive and responsive to the learning and professional development needs of the Field Epidemiologist. Field Epidemiologists are formally assessed by the CFEP once a year either by a teleconference or in person site visit. During the first assessment in April-May 2012, one or two CFEP Program Directors will assess how the Field Epidemiologist is settling in, and will identify any challenges or special needs which can be addressed through training or other means. The second assessment in April-May 2013 will be devoted to reviewing the Field Epidemiologist's performance and progress with regards to the PEGs. The placement site's performance will be assessed in the two assessments. We will provide you and the Field Epidemiologists with tools to participate in these evaluations.

Surveillance Project

In previous years, PEG#3 focused on the evaluation of a health event under surveillance. At the placements' request, this PEG has been broadened to include the design and implementation, OR the revision and implementation, OR the evaluation of a public health surveillance system. The placement supervisor or delegated surveillance supervisor is responsible for guiding the Field Epidemiologist through the chosen surveillance project. The placement supervisor (and/or surveillance supervisor) is also expected to attend the annual accredited Surveillance Workshop (April/May 2012 and 2013).

"Training through service"

Field Epidemiologists already have epidemiologic knowledge and skills—they join our program to enrich their public health and applied epidemiology experience through a hands-on, in-the-field approach. Field Epidemiologists working continuously on routine tasks or working in isolation of "content" professionals, risk losing interest in their placement-related activities. Placements that conduct field investigations of public

health problems are especially prized by Field Epidemiologists eager for applied epidemiology opportunities.

While we expect Field Epidemiologists to assist in placement-related field investigations throughout their two years, we recognize that not all placements have sufficient field opportunities. In addition, the Field Epidemiologist may wish to expand his or her skills (e.g., participating in a national outbreak once they become accomplished in local investigations). In these circumstances, we will identify opportunities to mobilize a Field Epidemiologist (see Epi-Aids, below), to gain hands-on experience and fulfill their personal learning objectives.

Epi-Aids

Epi-Aids are requests for Field Epidemiologists for short-term (three weeks) or occasionally longer (up to three months – e.g. STOP mission) field assistance, usually, but not limited to, provision of epidemiologic assistance for acute outbreaks. Requests for [Epi-Aids](#) follow a well-established policy which can be made available upon request.

When the Field Epidemiologist returns to their placement after an Epi-Aid, it is common to continue working on the Epi-Aid for a few weeks. Within two weeks after their return, a Trip Report must be submitted to their CFEP Program Director. Additional epidemiological analysis may also be required and/or publications as per the program PEGs.

The placement supervisor is not responsible for supervising the Field Epidemiologist during an Epi-Aid (unless this has been negotiated in the Terms of Reference). Their role is to support the Field Epidemiologist by assigning them placement-related activities which can be deferred or transferred to other staff when an Epi-Aid request occurs, and by recognizing that the Field Epidemiologist will be preoccupied with finishing Epi-Aid related tasks upon their return to the placement.

For Field Epidemiologists with an interest in international field work, we try to find them an opportunity, usually in their second year. If they are accepted on a STOP polio

mission, it means an absence from the placement for three months. Other international Epi-Aids can range from 3-8 weeks.

Placement supervisors must be aware that Field Epidemiologists may be pulled out of their placements at any time to assist in field investigations (Epi-Aids) outside of their placement jurisdiction.

Other Placement-Related Activities

When Field Epidemiologists are not working on their surveillance project or a field investigation, other placement activities might include opportunities to follow up sporadic cases of communicable disease or respond to public enquiries, analyze surveillance data, design a new surveillance system for a mass gathering or specific health event, participate in rounds, teaching/training, etc.

C. Other technical resources

The placement supervisor is also responsible for identifying appropriate placement-related technical resources for the Field Epidemiologist (e.g., GIS support) for placement-related work.

Administrative Support

Placements are expected to provide an appropriate physical environment (e.g., office space, computer, telephone, supplies) and secretarial support for the Field Epidemiologist. The placement must also financially and administratively support the Field Epidemiologist in their placement-related activities, including field investigations and travel for placement-related work.

All these requirements are detailed in a [Memorandum of Agreement](#), a trilateral agreement between CFEP, the Field Epidemiologist and the placement.

What CFEP provides

We provide the Field Epidemiologists with a laptop computer and peripherals (for field

work).

We financially support the Field Epidemiologist for Epi-Aids and for CFEP-mandated training modules (e.g., three weeks for the *Epidemiology in Action* course, seasonal training modules, etc.). CFEP is responsible for making all travel arrangements for Field Epidemiologists, either CFEP-related or placement-related travel, and will reimburse the employee directly for travel costs in accordance with applicable Treasury Board of Canada travel policies and directives. Where travel occurs at the request of the placement site, CFEP will arrange and pay for the Field Epidemiologist's travel costs, and placement sites will reimburse CFEP for these costs (in accordance with applicable Treasury Board of Canada rates) upon receipt of an invoice from CFEP. All CFEP-funded travel is managed by the CFEP administrative team.

Each year (April/May), primary placement supervisors are invited to our annual CFEP Supervisor Retreat and the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons Section 1 Accredited annual Surveillance Workshop, where Field Epidemiologists present their surveillance projects. Alternate supervisors are welcome to attend at their own expense.

Finally – we appreciate the work and commitment it takes to train our Field Epidemiologists. We welcome your participation to help us recruit new Field Epidemiologists as well as becoming facilitators in any CFEP training modules.

As we receive placement applications, we assess the suitability of each application. To this end, we may contact you personally to discuss areas of concern or for clarification. All suitable placements will be included in our Placement Catalogue. If you are interested in becoming a Field Epidemiologist placement, please complete the [Placement Application](#). Applications must be sent by email directly to **cfep@phac-aspc.gc.ca**.

The deadline for placement applications is December 20th, 2010.

Matching process

The review of application and selection of the 2011 placement sites will be made in January-February 2011. The criteria used for assessment are indicated in the placement site application questionnaire. Up to 10 sites will be selected. This process will increase the chance of filling all the selected placement sites. For new sites, a site visit or teleconference may take place in order to collect additional information and to better understand the nature of the placement.

A Placement Catalogue listing the selected placements will be distributed to the Field Epidemiologist candidates in March 2011; at the same time, the curricula vitae of the Field Epidemiologist candidates are distributed to potential placements. During March, both parties are encouraged to contact one another. Finally, each provides the CFEP with their top five ranked preferences. The recruitment process for Field Epidemiologists will be used to create a pool of candidates. There likely will be more candidates in the pool than the number of positions available. Based on the approach used by our international colleagues (US Epidemic Intelligence Service and the European Programme for Intervention Epidemiology Training), acceptance into the incoming Field Epidemiologist cohort will be contingent upon matching with an available placement site. This process will make it more likely, but still does not guarantee that all selected placement sites will be matched with a Field Epidemiologist.

The deadline for submitting ranked preferences is March 31, 2010.

As two years is a big commitment, we try to ensure the best fit between Field Epidemiologist, placement and supervisor. In determining the final match, we take into consideration a number of factors that include the skills and experience of the candidate, their ability to relocate if required as well as the needs of the placement

site. Our primary goal is to assign each Field Epidemiologist to a placement that will develop his/her competencies to the fullest.

We will not assign a Field Epidemiologist to a placement where he/she has been

Cohort 37 begins their two-year program in September 2011, with the three-week *Epidemiology in Action* Course in Ottawa.

The new Field Epidemiologists will report to their placements on October 3, 2011.

employed prior to beginning the program. The rationale behind this is twofold: one

Summary of Placement Requirements

- Workplace committed to applied epidemiology (communicable, non-communicable, environmental health, animal/human health), particularly those with field investigation opportunities
- Appropriate health event(s) under surveillance within the scope of their placement
- Primary and Alternate Supervisors with appropriate applied public health/epidemiology background
- Primary/Alternate Supervisors understand CFEP mandate and willing to support it
- Supervisors available a minimum of ½ day per week
- Able to provide technical resources (e.g. GIS support) and administrative support (office, computer, phone...)
- Funding available for placement-related activities

objective of the program is to offer opportunities to expand the breadth of the Field Epidemiologist's professional experience (i.e., giving someone the opportunity to work at the provincial or local level if s/he only has federal experience); secondly, by placing someone in his/her usual workplace, we risk that some old work or roles may carry over into their Field Epidemiologist life, which may distract the Field Epidemiologist from working towards their PEGs.