

NHSC TUTORIAL TRANSCRIPT

Section A: Ambassadors

Ambassador Program Overview

The National Health Service Corps builds healthy communities by supporting qualified medical, dental, and behavioral health care providers working in areas of the United States with limited access to care. As an Ambassador, you will help educate providers and students about the NHSC and assist them in their journey to become a member of the Corps. This tutorial is part of the online toolkit for Ambassadors, designed to provide you with tips, resources, and ideas to help you generate awareness about the NHSC and train and mentor providers and students to practice in Health Professional Shortage Areas.

The National Health Service Corps recognizes and appreciates the time that you, as an Ambassador, dedicate to helping us achieve our mission. We are here to support you and provide materials that may help you get the word out about the Corps.

We also want to ensure that current and prospective Corps members are connected to Ambassadors who are interested and available to work with them. Active Ambassadors are asked to conduct a minimum of six activities per year, post an NHSC provided poster or flyer in their workplace, and use the online Ambassador Portal to report on activities and update contact information, as needed.

This interactive training provides an overview of three activity areas that you may employ as an NHSC Ambassador.

While the ideas discussed in this training and in the Ambassador Toolkit give you a place to start, you shouldn't limit yourself—we welcome your creative thinking.

Generating Awareness

If providers and students don't know about the National Health Service Corps, they can't apply for NHSC programs. That's where you come in. One of the most important tasks you undertake as an Ambassador is generating awareness of the Corps and the great opportunities we have to offer.

By branding yourself as an Ambassador, people will know you are involved with the NHSC and that they can contact you for information about our programs. When speaking with colleagues, your supervisor, providers, students, or other interested individuals, let them know that you're an Ambassador for the NHSC. Send them an email after your conversation and provide more detailed information about your role as an Ambassador. You can use the sample introductory email provided in the online toolkit to follow up.

Get in contact with other local Ambassadors and discuss opportunities to work together. Networking with Ambassadors in your area can create a collaborative local network for sharing ideas and opportunities. You can use the Ambassador Directory on the NHSC Web site to identify them. Add your title as an Ambassador for the National Health Service Corps to your email signature and to your business cards.

And finally, distribute NHSC fact sheets or hang up posters in your community to increase awareness about the Corps. This will also alert people who may not know much about the NHSC that you are a source for more information.

Start building awareness of the National Health Service Corps by simply talking about it. When you're speaking with providers and students, mention NHSC programs. If the persons you're speaking with seem interested, send them an email providing introductory information. A sample email is provided for both potential loan repayment and scholarship applicants in the Ambassador Toolkit.

Direct people to our Facebook and Twitter pages. This will provide a convenient way for people to gather information and share comments.

Also, consider giving a brief presentation at an orientation session on campus or at a professional association meeting. A PowerPoint presentation is available in the Ambassador Toolkit.

Working with local media outlets is another great way to generate awareness about the National Health Service Corps in the broader community.

Consider writing a letter to the editor of your local newspaper or submitting an article for state professional association newsletters. Describe the NHSC's mission, the opportunities its programs provide, and the impact that it has on the people in your community. A sample letter to the editor and article are provided in the Ambassador Toolkit; use them for your submission.

Also, share public service announcements with local newspapers, magazines, or groups and associations that publish print or electronic newsletters. The Ambassador Toolkit provides several versions of public service announcements to choose from.

If you host large awareness or recruitment events, use a media advisory or press release to alert local media outlets. By reaching out to the media, you will greatly increase the chances of them reporting on your event. See the media advisory template in the Toolkit to get started.

Recruiting for NHSC Programs

Once providers and students are aware of and have expressed an interest in the National Health Service Corps, help nurture their interest by encouraging them to become actively involved by applying to an NHSC program.

Familiarize yourself with the NHSC's key programs, as well as other HRSA programs that may be of interest to your audience. Review program particulars such as eligibility requirements, award amounts, and Application and Program Guidance to be prepared to discuss the programs with potential applicants.

If a prospective Corps member has questions you don't know how to answer, call or email the HRSA Call Center, visit the NHSC Web site, or tap into the NHSC's network of other Ambassadors, State Primary Care Offices, Primary Care Associations, State Offices of Rural Health or Area Health Education Centers.

You may undertake a variety of awareness activities as an Ambassador. We'll discuss a few ideas in this presentation, but don't feel limited by our suggestions. If you have other ideas for effective ways to recruit providers and students, you are encouraged to try them.

You may want to consider hosting an informational session or brown bag lunch to provide details about NHSC programs to potential applicants. At the event, you can give a presentation about the details of a specific NHSC program, or invite a Corps alumnus or currently serving provider to discuss his or her experience. If you decide to give a presentation, you can use the modulated "NHSC 101" PowerPoint presentation in the Ambassador Toolkit and tailor it for your particular audience.

Remember, the details of each program change from year to year, so keep interested candidates informed of critical information such as award amounts and application deadlines. As an Ambassador you'll receive an email any time the NHSC has an important announcement. Forward this information to potential applicants if it is relevant to them.

You can also help put the Corps in direct contact with potential applicants. If a prospective Corps member is interested in getting more information about the NHSC, ask him or her complete a "contact sheet" that gathers information about where the individual is in school and programs he or she may be interested in. The contact sheets are in the Ambassador Toolkit, which will tell you who to submit them to. The Corps regularly sends out information about the Scholarship and Loan Repayment Programs and would be happy to send this information to candidates you identify.

NHSC programs are highly competitive, so it's important for candidates to submit a complete application early in the application cycle. Offer to help candidates through the application process, reminding them of important dates and deadlines.

If you don't feel comfortable assisting candidates with the application process, refer them to the HRSA Call Center, or local resources such as NHSC's regional offices or your state's Primary Care Office.

Often providers interested in the Loan Repayment Program don't understand that they must secure employment at an NHSC approved site *before* submitting their NHSC application. You can help the Loan Repayment applicants you are working with find eligible job opportunities in your community. Attend career fairs and tap into your networks to make sure you know about jobs at NHSC approved sites. Also, direct providers to the NHSC Recruitment Site where they can search for all eligible NHSC positions across the country.

Another great way to help applicants find a qualifying job is to *create* eligible jobs by helping sites in your area become NHSC approved. Contact your NHSC regional office or your state Primary Care Office for more information about how sites can become NHSC approved.

Training and Mentoring

NHSC Ambassadors play an important role in helping to prepare prospective NHSC members to practice in a community in need and mentoring new Corps members through their service commitment.

By preparing providers before their service begins and making sure they have a support system as they start their service, you are increasing the likelihood that they will have a good experience and choose to remain in the community even after their commitment to the Corps is over.

NHSC providers who have been exposed to critical issues that arise in medically underserved and culturally diverse clinical settings before their service begins have a greater chance of success.

To really drive home these ideas, invite an NHSC provider currently serving in your area to talk about his or her experiences. Or, if you work at a learning institution, establish a cultural competence curriculum and training plan.

Identify hands-on learning experiences and expose students and residents to the nuances of providing primary care in communities in need.

The Student/Resident Experiences and Rotations in Community Health Program, known as SEARCH, gives students and residents a sense of what working in a medically underserved community is really like. Rotations typically include a clinical practice module and some community service.

If SEARCH does not operate in your area, work with local partners such as state Primary Care Offices or Primary Care Associations, State Offices of Rural Health, and Area Health Education Centers, or AHECs, to identify rotation and shadowing opportunities. Or, look into developing an exchange program with a campus or health center in another state or region.

NHSC Ambassadors often create new and innovative practice experiences to help train and mentor prospective or current NHSC members. We encourage you to be creative in developing a training protocol that is informative, engaging, and best meets the health needs of your community and the educational needs of the providers or students you work with.

Serving as a mentor can be time consuming and may not be for everyone. However, if you work with a student or provider over a period of time, first introducing him or her to the NHSC and then providing application assistance and job preparation and training, a strong mentoring relationship is likely to evolve. And, for students and early-career providers, having a trusted information source to guide them, listen to their concerns, and answer questions may be a key element in ensuring their success.

Each mentoring relationship is different; its tone is determined by the personalities of the Ambassador and the student or provider seeking guidance. Here are a few things to keep in mind when serving as a mentor:

- Allow the student or provider you are working with to drive the relationship, setting the tone, pace, and expectations based on what they hope to learn from you.
- Be accessible. Strong personal connections are an essential part of any mentoring relationship because individuals must feel comfortable enough to confide in their mentors, ask difficult questions, and find value in the advice offered.
- Make sure you and the student or provider are on the same page. Knowing what each of you hopes to achieve through the mentoring relationship is critical to ensuring success.

The NHSC has developed mentoring guides to help you form a productive mentoring relationship. But these are just guides and you may need to adjust them to better meet the needs of your unique mentoring relationship.

Reporting Your Activities

Through this training we hope you've seen that there are numerous opportunities for you to support the National Health Service Corps by generating awareness about the NHSC, recruiting providers and students to NHSC programs, and providing training and mentoring to support providers and students as they pursue primary care careers in underserved areas.

We ask that you provide feedback about all of the activities you undertake as an Ambassador and report them in the Ambassador Portal. This will help us track the effectiveness of the Ambassador program and demonstrate to other stakeholders the great value you bring.

To access the Ambassador Portal, simply go to the Ambassador's section of the NHSC Web site and click on "Log into the Ambassador Portal."

To log in, you will need the email address and password you were issued when you first signed up for the Ambassador program. Once you've entered the Ambassador Portal, follow the screen prompts to report your activities.

In addition to tracking activities, the Ambassador Portal will enable you to request NHSC materials and access information about other Ambassadors.

We hope you have found this training useful. We encourage you to explore the Ambassador's Online Toolkit at nhsc.hrsa.gov, and to click through other sections of the NHSC Web site. If you have any questions about your role as an Ambassador or if you need support, please email Diane Culkin at dculkin@hrsa.gov.

Section B: Providers

Applying to the Loan Repayment Program

The mission of the National Health Service Corps is to build healthy communities by supporting qualified health care providers dedicated to working in areas of the United States with limited access to care. Primary care providers who want to practice in underserved areas experience great benefits, financial and otherwise, by being a member of the Corps.

The National Health Service Corps Loan Repayment Program makes it possible for qualified primary care providers to work in underserved communities without the worry of paying back their educational loans.

By accepting an NHSC loan repayment award, you agree to provide full-time primary care service for a *minimum* of two years, or part-time service for four years, in exchange for funds to pay off qualifying educational loans. Once enrolled in the Loan Repayment Program, you can extend your service to pay off a greater portion of your loans.

In addition to financial support, the Loan Repayment Program offers a variety of other benefits. You have the option of fulfilling part of your service obligation by teaching. You gain access to free continuing education units and the chance to network with other members of the Corps at conferences and through virtual networking opportunities. You also perform challenging work and develop rewarding relationships with patients.

Any U.S. citizen or national with qualifying educational loans and a valid certificate or license to practice primary care could be eligible for the National Health Service Corps Loan Repayment Program. Your license must be for one of the NHSC eligible primary care disciplines. And, your license must be valid for the state where you plan to work, unless you are working at a tribal site, in which case you can hold a license from any state.

Loan Repayment Program applicants must also be employed at or have an offer of employment from an approved NHSC site.

The commitment to provide primary health care in an underserved area is a commitment to the people in the community you serve as well as to the National Health Service Corps.

For most eligible disciplines the NHSC Loan Repayment Program defines full-time clinical practice as a minimum of 40 hours of work per week, for a minimum of 45 weeks per year. Half-time practice is defined as a minimum of 20 hours per week also for a minimum of 45 weeks per year. There are a few exceptions to these guidelines depending on your primary care discipline so read the NHSC Application and Program Guidance carefully before applying to the program.

Finding a job at a National Health Service Corps site is the first step in the application process. When you submit your application you will need to verify that you have either a job or job offer

from an approved site and will start working at that site within 60 days of submission of your application.

Once you've secured a position at an approved NHSC site, you'll be ready to apply to the Loan Repayment Program. The entire NHSC application process can be completed online. You will first need to create an account. Then, complete your application and upload the required supporting documentation.

Where Do NHSC Providers Serve?

The National Health Service Corps uses Health Professional Shortage Area, or HPSA, designations to determine the degree of need at a site. HPSA status can be assigned based on geographic location, demographics of the population served, or the type of institution. The higher the HPSA score, the greater the need in that area.

Applicants to NHSC programs should understand that not all sites located in designated HPSAs are NHSC approved sites. Health delivery sites choose to apply to join the NHSC network of approved sites. By joining this network, sites experience several benefits, including the ability to recruit and employ providers participating in the NHSC Loan Repayment and Scholarship Programs.

To maintain their NHSC approved status, sites are required to meet certain operating requirements. NHSC sites must abide by policies that improve access for patients who have limited access to care.

Loan repayment applicants who are working at a health care site, may already be at an NHSC approved site. You can find out by searching the NHSC database of approved sites. This database is operated by the Health Resources and Services Administration and can be found at datawarehouse.hrsa.gov.

If you're not at an NHSC approved site, or if you are a recent graduate or applicant not currently working, search the NHSC's Recruitment Site to find job openings at approved NHSC sites.

The NHSC State-by-State Guide is another useful resource. This is a one stop shop with helpful information about communities across the country, from climate information to specific health considerations.

What Happens When You Become an NHSC Provider?

So what happens if you receive a loan repayment award from the National Health Service Corps? Working as an NHSC Provider is similar to any other job—but you'll work in a setting where you use your training to provide care to people who might otherwise not have access to health services. There are some immediate steps you should take, and a network of support there to help you.

When you are selected to receive an NHSC loan repayment award, you will receive a welcome letter and copy of your contract, which you will need to read, sign, and return to the NHSC.

Participating in the Loan Repayment Program is a formal commitment, so it is important that you understand your responsibilities and obligations and are prepared to meet them.

If you breach your contract in any way, you may be placed in default and be liable for damages.

Interviewing Tips

The National Health Service Corps' goal is to connect health care providers with communities that need their services, and our hope is that Corps members will remain at their service site even after their loan repayment service commitment has ended. Similar to any job you might apply for, you will likely be asked to interview with any sites where you're applying for a position.

You have found an opportunity you like, submitted your application, and been called in for an interview. What's next? Before the interview, learn as much as you can about the NHSC site. If possible, try to learn something about the person who will be interviewing you. Write down the questions you want to ask and bring copies of your resume.

Most employers do not hire people based on merit alone. Personality, confidence, enthusiasm, and how you relate to the interviewer are very important. Make a list of questions you think the interviewer may ask, and practice your answers with a friend or mentor. Also practice listening to the questions and thinking of ways to build on them so that you can have a dynamic conversation. Dress for success, be organized, and get ready to put your best foot forward.

Always follow up with a thank-you note after the interview. If you want to go the extra mile, send a thank-you email within 48 hours of the interview and also drop a hand-written note in the mail. These personal touches can make all the difference.

Responsibility of LRP Awardees

Accepting a National Health Service Corps Loan Repayment Program (LRP) award is a serious commitment, and program members have certain responsibilities throughout their period of service.

The NHSC requires LRP members to work a specified minimum number of hours per week over the course of their service commitment, and asks that employers verify paid and unpaid work hours every six months.

In addition to keeping track of service hours completed, program members should ensure that their employer maintains status as an NHSC approved site. NHSC sites maintain "approved" status for three years from the time they are first accepted. Program members should check with the site administrator to ensure that he or she takes steps to renew approval status prior to the expiration date.

The NHSC's goal is to retain providers in the communities that most need their services. So, we encourage Corps members to extend their service commitment beyond the initial two years.

To receive an NHSC Loan Repayment Continuation Contract, first make sure the NHSC site where you are working is still an approved site. Also, ensure you are up-to-date with all of your six month verification forms. No later than 90 days before your current contract ends, apply to the NHSC for a continuation contract. Visit the NHSC web site for specific instructions on how to apply.

As a recipient of a Loan Repayment Program Award, you are expected to fulfill your service commitment at the NHSC approved site identified in your practice agreement.

If you experience a major life change or obstacle that prevents you from completing your service commitment at your NHSC approved site, contact the NHSC immediately. We will work with you to find a way to resolve the situation.

SECTION C: STUDENTS

Considering Applying to the Scholarship Program?

The National Health Service Corps Scholarship Program is a great opportunity for health professions students with a passion for primary care and an interest in working in an underserved community. The NHSC builds healthy communities by supporting qualified health care providers dedicated to working in areas of the United States with limited access to care.

The NHSC Scholarship Program (SP) pays tuition, required fees, some other education costs and a monthly taxable living stipend for as many as four years. Upon graduation, scholarship recipients serve as primary care providers between two and four years in a community-based site in a high-need Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA).

In addition to financial support, NHSC scholars have access to educational, training, and networking opportunities to support their professional growth.

Students who are in their second, third or fourth year of school can still apply to the scholarship program. And, once their scholarship service obligation is complete, they may also apply to the NHSC loan repayment program, which means students can pay off the remainder of their education loans in exchange for additional service.

Students enrolled in or accepted to a training program that will lead to a degree in allopathic or osteopathic medicine or dentistry, or leading to a degree as a nurse practitioner, nurse-midwife, or physician assistant may be eligible for the Scholarship program. To be eligible for consideration, you must also be a U.S. citizen or national.

Exact application dates and deadlines for the NHSC Scholarship Program vary from year to year. Generally, the application cycle opens in the Spring and awards are announced no later than September 30th each year. For specific information about the current application cycle, visit NHSC.HRSA.GOV and click on “Scholarship.” You can sign up to receive email alerts about the opening of the next application cycle and find out more about the application process.

If you are enrolled or have been accepted for enrollment in an accredited training program, you may start the application process. The entire NHSC application process can be completed online by going to that same Web site, NHSC.hrsa.gov, and clicking on the “Apply Now” button.

The application requires several supporting documents including your resume, a written essay and other forms that you will need to get from your school. Applicants are also required to respond to an essay question.

NHSC Scholars: From School to Practice

If you are selected to receive an NHSC scholarship, you will receive a welcome letter and copy of your contract. You will also be assigned an NHSC analyst who can answer your questions and give you guidance throughout your time as a scholar.

You should be sure to save a copy of the Application Program Guidance from the year you applied. It contains detailed information about the program that you will need throughout your training and as you begin to practice.

Accepting a National Health Service Corps Scholarship award is a serious commitment. As a Corps scholar you will have certain responsibilities during school and as you practice at an NHSC-approved site. There are four important steps you will need to take after you have been awarded your scholarship and while you are still in school.

First, you must maintain full-time enrollment with good academic standing in the academic program for which the scholarship was awarded. Changes in your enrollment status or academic standing can impact your scholarship.

Second, you should keep in touch with the NHSC throughout your period of service. If for any reason your legal name, address, student status or other information changes, notify the NHSC as soon as possible.

The NHSC has an online Customer Service Portal, which will serve as your primary means for conducting business with the NHSC. The portal can be accessed by visiting the NHSC webpage at nhsc.hrsa.gov and clicking on the “Customer Service Portal” button. You will use the same login and password you created when applying to the program to access your information on the portal.

Third, manage your scholarship with your school. Review the *Scholarship Program Guidelines for Your School* included in your welcome packet and make sure the correct offices at your school have a copy of these guidelines and are prepared to follow them.

Finally, at the end of each semester, you must also contact your school officials to ensure that they have completed the Verification of Good Standing Form and returned it to the NHSC.

The NHSC is here to support you while you are still in school. A great way to learn more about your time in the program, and to connect with fellow Corps scholars, is to attend the NHSC New Scholar Orientation conference. Conference dates will be shared with you when you receive an award. The NHSC covers the cost of travel, lodging, ground transportation, meals, and incidental expenses for the conference.

The NHSC can connect you to a number of resources to help you complete your education. Student/Resident Experiences and Rotations in Community Health, or SEARCH, is a state-based program that enables students and residents to serve clinical rotations on health care teams in underserved communities across the United States. Rotations typically include a clinical practice module as well as a community service project. SEARCH programs are available in 28 U.S. states and territories.

The Collegiate Health Service Corps, or CHSC, is a similar program where undergraduates learn firsthand what it's like to work in primary care in a community in need through service learning experiences. CHSC programs include classroom training as well as a clinical practice module.

In addition to these resources, the NHSC offers exclusive content for Corps scholars at www.PrimaryCareForAll.org. This unique Web site offers blogs, forums, and file sharing to create a virtual community for students as well as providers working in underserved communities.

You will have a lot on your mind as you prepare to fulfill your service commitment and we are here to help. You can contact staff in one of our 10 regional offices across the country to have your questions answered or get connected to other resources in your state. The HRSA Call Center is also available from 9am to 5:30pm Monday through Friday to answer questions you may have. And, you can also ask questions any time of day through the Customer Service Portal.

NHSC Ambassadors can also serve as helpful resources to you. NHSC Ambassadors are faculty members and health care professionals who volunteer their time to work with providers and health professions students who are applying for or are enrolled in NHSC programs. If there is an NHSC Ambassador in your area, reach out to him or her. You can find a nearby Ambassador through the Ambassador directory on the NHSC Web site.

Should you need additional help identifying training and networking opportunities, NHSC state and local partners can serve as resources. For example, State Primary Care Offices know providers and sites in their state—including NHSC approved sites. And Area Health Education Centers can connect students to educational opportunities, continuing education, and rotations for residents.

The commitment to provide primary health care in an underserved area is a commitment to the people in the community you serve as well as to the National Health Service Corps. Service must be completed at an NHSC approved site.

Finding a job at an NHSC approved site is the first step in transitioning from being an NHSC Scholar in training to being a practicing provider. All scholars will be invited to a Scholar Placement Conference at the beginning of their last year of school or approved postgraduate training. The conference explains the process for visiting sites and relocating. It also provides an opportunity for you to meet representatives from some of the eligible NHSC sites that have current job openings.

Another useful resource that will introduce you to the differences in serving in states across the country is our State-by-State Guide. This is a one stop resource with a lot of what you need to know about moving to a new community, from climate information to specific health considerations.

And, scholars can visit the NHSC recruitment site that allows you to view current job openings. This list changes regularly and may not include every job opening at NHSC sites since site needs are continually changing.

National Health Service Corps Scholars agree to provide primary health care services at an NHSC approved site of greatest need based on a Health Professional Shortage Area, or HPSA, score.

The NHSC uses HPSA designations to determine the degree of need at any given site. HPSA status can be assigned based on geographic location, demographics of the population served, or the type of institution. The higher the HPSA score, the greater the need in that area. HPSA scores, as required by law, are reviewed each year and can change from year to year. Scholarship recipients should understand that not all sites located in designated HPSAs are NHSC approved sites. Health delivery sites can choose to apply to join the NHSC network of approved sites. By joining the NHSC, sites experience several benefits, including the ability to recruit and employ providers participating in the Loan Repayment and Scholarship Programs.

To maintain their NHSC approved status, sites are required to meet certain requirements. NHSC sites must abide by policies that improve access to health care services including serving all patients regardless of their ability to pay and offering a sliding fee schedule so patients can pay what they can afford.

Upon graduation, or completion of approved postgraduate training, you agree to provide full-time or part-time primary health care at an approved NHSC site, in a community of greatest need. You provide one year of service for each year or partial year of scholarship support received, with a minimum commitment of two years and a maximum commitment of four years for a full-time service commitment, or double the period for half-time service.

Full-time clinical practice is a minimum of 40 hours per week. Part-time is a minimum of 20 hours per week. You must serve a minimum of 45 weeks each service year.

With certain exceptions, your service period must begin as soon as you have finished your training and have received your license to practice. NHSC Scholars who develop an interest in sub-specializing must complete their service obligation to the NHSC before pursuing further training.

It is also important to understand that NHSC Scholarship support is for health professions school only, and does not cover educational or living expenses associated with residency training or fellowships.

Once you are serving at an NHSC approved site, you will need to submit a service verification form every six months.

The NHSC also expects that you will fulfill your commitment at your NHSC-approved service site, however, we understand that circumstances may arise that may require you to leave the initial service site and complete service at another NHSC-approved site. If you need to a transfer to another site, you must notify the NHSC in writing before leaving the initial site.

The Corps is here to support you throughout your service commitment. You will continue to have access to many of the resources, including the regional office staff, Customer Service Portal and the HRSA Call Center throughout your time as a practicing NHSC provider.