

**Quality and Productivity Commission**  
**34<sup>th</sup> Annual Productivity and Quality Awards Program**  
**"Leading with Excellence"**

**2021 APPLICATION**

Title of Project (Limited to 50 characters, including spaces, using Arial 12-point font):

**NAME OF PROJECT: COVID-19 CONTACT TRACING STUDENT INTERNSHIP**

DATE OF IMPLEMENTATION/ADOPTION: JUNE 17, 2020

(Must have been fully implemented for a minimum of at least one year - on or before July 1, 2020)

CHECK HERE IF THIS PROJECT IS BEING SUBMITTED FOR THE **COVID-19 IMPACT AWARD ONLY**. (Projects must be implemented on or before December 31, 2020. **Note:** Projects implemented less than one year ago will not be eligible for any other PQA awards. In addition, once a project is submitted, you cannot submit the same project for awards consideration in subsequent years).

PROJECT STATUS:  Ongoing  One-time only

HAS YOUR DEPARTMENT PREVIOUSLY SUBMITTED THIS PROJECT?  Yes  No


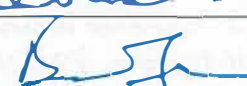
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Describe the project in 15 lines or less using Arial 12 point font. State clearly and concisely what difference the project has made.

1 On March 4, 2020, the County of Los Angeles (LAC) Board of Supervisors and the Department  
 2 of Public Health (DPH) declared a local and public health emergency in response to the  
 3 increased spread of SARS-CoV-2. To support its ongoing efforts in combating COVID-19, LAC  
 4 DPH Case and Contact Interview Branch (CCIB) sought unpaid interns to participate in contact  
 5 tracing efforts. "Contact tracing" activities comprise follow-up with people who have tested  
 6 positive for the coronavirus, identifying others with whom they may have come in close contact,  
 7 and following-up with those "contacts" to remind them of their self-isolation/quarantining  
 8 obligations and responsibilities, per the Health Officer Order ("HOO"). This internship provides  
 9 students with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to participate on the ground floor in an historic  
 10 public health crisis. Since Summer 2020, LAC DPH has hosted more than 600 student interns  
 11 from 12+ colleges/universities, providing them with training and an unparalleled public health  
 12 experience. For students interested in a career in public health or related fields, this internship  
 13 provides hands-on training and experience in a fundamental part of students' chosen fields.  
 14 The students have, in turn, provided approximately 72,000 hours (the annual equivalent of  
 15 approximately 35 FTEs), valued at close to \$3,000,000 of contact tracing services to LAC DPH.

BENEFITS TO THE COUNTY

(1) ACTUAL/ESTIMATED ANNUAL COST AVOIDANCE	(2) ACTUAL/ESTIMATED ANNUAL COST SAVINGS	(3) ACTUAL/ESTIMATED ANNUAL REVENUE	(1) + (2) + (3) = TOTAL ANNUAL ACTUAL/ESTIMATED BENEFIT	SERVICE ENHANCEMENT PROJECT
\$ <b>2,973,722</b>	\$	\$	\$ <b>2,973,722</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

ANNUAL = 12 MONTHS ONLY

SUBMITTING DEPARTMENT NAME AND COMPLETE ADDRESS Department of Public Health: Children's Medical Services (CMS) 9320 Telstar Avenue, El Monte, CA 91731		TELEPHONE NUMBER 626-569-6001
PROGRAM MANAGER'S NAME Shieva Davarian EMAIL sdavarian@ph.lacounty.gov		TELEPHONE NUMBER 626-569-6521
PRODUCTIVITY MANAGER'S NAME AND SIGNATURE (PLEASE CALL (213) 893-0322 IF YOU DO NOT KNOW YOUR PRODUCTIVITY MANAGER'S NAME) Catherine Mak  6-25-21		TELEPHONE NUMBER <b>213-288-7240</b> EMAIL <b>cmak@ph.lacounty.gov</b>
DEPARTMENT HEAD'S NAME AND SIGNATURE Barbara Ferrer, PhD, MPH, MEd 		TELEPHONE NUMBER 213-288-8117 DATE 6/25/2021

**\*\*ELECTRONIC, WET, OR SCANNED SIGNATURES ARE ACCEPTABLE\*\***

**Quality and Productivity Commission**  
**34<sup>th</sup> Annual Productivity and Quality Awards Program**  
**“Leading with Excellence”**

**2021 APPLICATION**

Title of Project (Limited to 50 characters, including spaces, using Arial 12-point font):

**NAME OF PROJECT: COVID-19 CONTACT TRACING STUDENT INTERNSHIP**

**Challenges:**

On March 4, 2020, the Los Angeles County (LAC) Board of Supervisors and its Department of Public Health (DPH) declared a local and public health emergency in response to the increased spread of SARS-CoV-2, the virus responsible for coronavirus-2019 (COVID-19), across the Country. LA County was hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many LAC employees were reassigned from their permanent assignments to assist with the COVID-19 response. This created several challenges:

- **Challenges for LAC and Disaster Service Workers (DSWs):**
  - There were fewer staff left to handle the traditional business operations and services in their home departments and programs.
  - Staff were working overtime in their permanent and re-assigned roles to compensate for the loss of staff resources deployed in the County's COVID responses.
  - There are also fewer employees available to supervise interns and volunteers.
- **Challenges for Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) and their students:**
  - With stay-at-home orders, students could not find internship placements in their respective fields of study (for DPH, public health and related disciplines) and the current placements ended early for many others due to the pandemic lock-down.
  - Students were in danger of not graduating or not complying with degree requirements.
  - DPH could no longer support individual internships the way it had in previous years because staff were working remotely, reassigned to pandemic efforts and/or were overwhelmed fulfilling their own work responsibilities with fewer staff resources.

**Solutions:**

In light of these conditions and the constant requests from students and schools for internship opportunities, CMS (in conjunction with the DPH's Contact and Case Interviewing Branch [CCIB] to whom CMS staff were partially reassigned) created a once-in-a-lifetime internship program that responds to: 1) LAC DPH's Contact Tracing (CT) needs, 2) students seeking intern-ships and ground-floor experience in the most important public health crisis of their lives, and 3) improved COVID response efforts for the LAC residents CT is designed to serve. The student internship program supports DPH's COVID CT efforts, provides students with real-life, unparalleled public health experience and academic credit required for their degrees, and secures another workforce resource in the COVID response at little cost to the County.

The student internship program has enrolled, trained, and benefited from the services of over 600 student interns from a dozen schools and universities since creating the opportunity in Summer 2020—totaling approximately 72,000 work hours (120 hours minimum per student x 600 students) of CT support with no associated labor costs. The steady flow of interns each semester relieves DSWs of some of the COVID response burden and enables them to return to their ongoing essential service functions. Additionally, the program has led to strong bonds with local IHE, and DPH will be able to use this unique model for future outbreaks, pandemics, case finding and CT activities in STD, communicable and other vector disease surveillance, and public health investigation.

Quality and Productivity Commission  
**34<sup>th</sup> Annual Productivity and Quality Awards Program**  
*“Leading with Excellence”*

**2021 APPLICATION**

Title of Project (Limited to 50 characters, including spaces, using Arial 12-point font):

**NAME OF PROJECT: COVID-19 CONTACT TRACING STUDENT INTERNSHIP**

The remote, unpaid CT internship requires IHE to organize a team of students to cover a minimum of three shifts a week (Friday-Sunday or Saturday-Monday). Schools agree to organize a minimum of 5-7 interviewers plus a team lead for each of those three days for the duration of the school term. This is a unique strategy for deploying student interns in what has traditionally been full-time staff roles, in recognition of their more limited availability and student scheduling conflicts (classes, coursework, family obligations, work, etc.) while enhancing CT activities when they are most needed (on weekends). It also alleviates much of the intern supervision responsibilities from DPH staff and shifts them to the IHE.

Students are required to fulfill a minimum of 120 hours during the school term, which averages to one 8-hour shift per week for 15 weeks per student; there is flexibility in the system that allows interns to double-up on shifts if they need more hours. DPH HR reduced County onboarding documentation by more than half, and expedited processing down to a week to generate County emails for the interns. Students complete 40 hours of HIPAA, County onboarding, CT, and interpersonal dynamic/customer service training prior to starting their shifts (three days of online, self-learning modules and two days remote, live interactives with their peers and staff). The training platforms and materials had been created previously for DSWs and adapted to this specific audience. Students use their own or school IT devices and access, while DPH provided necessary Teams, CRM database, Amazon Connect (browser-based phone services so they do not use their own phones and numbers) and related software connections. Additionally, the program supplemented its work with students by:

- Re-training, when needed.
- Pairing school teams with existing CT teams for support, mentorship and career guidance.
- A weekend CT manager to oversee operations when other staff are not available.
- A webinar series, which includes topics on public health careers, work-life balance and other issues to help the students understand their role in the greater public health context and to offset limited one-on-one mentorship that this internship format can offer. Recordings are shared with faculty, students and classes to keep current and past interns connected and for recruitment of future interns.

**Benefits:**

- With a previously untapped unpaid labor resource for the COVID response fewer DSW staff were needed in COVID-19 CT, allowing them to continue their other essential services. Existing staff could reduce the overtime hours, and the physical/mental and financial toll of prolonged staff overtime hours could be reduced/mitigated in part.
- The internship's unique foundational “team” model allowed interns to work thousands of hours. No additional costs for IT, hardware and software were incurred because the IT infrastructure had already been engineered for other DSWs. Many students are computer-literate and often have more digital familiarity than their professional counterparts—which often enabled them to acclimate to the online, digital and communications needs of CT at a very efficient pace.

**Quality and Productivity Commission**  
**34<sup>th</sup> Annual Productivity and Quality Awards Program**  
**“Leading with Excellence”**

**2021 APPLICATION**

Title of Project (Limited to 50 characters, including spaces, using Arial 12-point font):

**NAME OF PROJECT: COVID-19 CONTACT TRACING STUDENT INTERNSHIP**

- The design of the internship, its team model and remote nature of the internship program helped schools and students by:
  - Giving students an incomparable opportunity to be part of an historic public health event and to contribute to the essential public health crisis work while fulfilling degree requirements, even when not interning in-person.
  - Allowing students and faculty from around the country, and internationally (many of whom had moved back home to other locales during the pandemic), to participate in community engagement activities without exposing them to the risk of COVID transmission.
  - Honing their critical thinking abilities, enhancing their teamwork, communication and leadership skills, and exposing them to professionals and leaders in the field.
- The program’s remote structure created more diverse cohorts of student interns with students from private and public IHE, first-generation college students, returning students, ranging in cultural/ethnic/racial/linguistic backgrounds, in ages and generations, income status, and with diverse roles, identities and living circumstances. Majors included nursing, public health, epidemiology/biostatistics, social work/adult mental health, community health education, healthcare administration/management, psychology, healthcare systems engineering, human and health sciences, communications, biology/biochemistry; degree levels included Bachelors, Masters, post-BA certificate and doctoral students.
- The student internship program created multiple process improvements of which DPH has availed itself for other uses, for example: paring down the onboarding packets helped DPH HR migrate new temporary staff for vaccination work much faster; DPH ODT (Office of Development and Training) has adapted training format changes made for the student internship program into other training formats; working collaboratively with multiple DPH units and divisions, IT workflow efficiencies introduced for the student interns have created faster DSW onboarding into DPH’s IT environments for other COVID purposes.
- This student internship program has not incurred additional costs for DPH. Without the specific attention that internships have required in the past—with hundreds of students onboarded and managed in CT concurrently, DPH was able to achieve significant economies of scale.
- Additionally, it has saved the County an estimated \$2,973,772 in payroll and associated staffing costs that the County would have incurred if it was paying this workforce, equivalent to 35 FTEs working for a full year.

Quality and Productivity Commission  
34<sup>th</sup> Annual Productivity and Quality Awards Program  
“Leading with Excellence”

2021 APPLICATION

Title of Project (Limited to 50 characters, including spaces, using Arial 12-point font):

**NAME OF PROJECT: COVID-19 CONTACT TRACING STUDENT INTERNSHIP**

**Linkage to the County Strategic Plan – 1 page only.** Which County Strategic Plan goal(s) does this project address? Explain how. Use Arial 12-point font.

The COVID-19 CCIB Contact Tracing Internship Program addresses the County Strategic Plan goals of “Making Investments that Transform Lives”, “Fostering Vibrant and Resilient Communities”, and “Realizing Tomorrow’s Government Today”. The program, which is a partnership between DPH and public and private institutions of higher education (IHE), has allowed DPH to tap into student interns to contribute to contact tracing efforts during a global pandemic. The 600+ interns have helped/are helping DPH reach more cases/contacts during a critical window to slow the spread of COVID-19 and ultimately play a critical role in helping the County lower its COVID case counts, assist in scheduling vaccine appointments, and generally support the County’s economic recovery. Interns also have an immediate and direct impact on the lives and health of LAC residents by identifying when interviewees are in medical distress and linking them to emergency services and medical care during their interview. The strong bonds established with local IHE through this program will allow DPH to use this model in future outbreaks as well as to meet DPH’s ongoing contact tracing needs, such as in STD, communicable and other vector disease surveillance, and public health investigation. This student internship program helps advance, train, and educate the next generation of public health professionals; some of our past interns have already been hired by DPH or their local public health agencies, or in other organizations as public health professionals post-graduation.

Additionally, the student internship program advances the County’s values of integrity, inclusivity, compassion, and customer orientation. Students are given HIPAA training and customer service/interpersonal dynamic skills training prior to starting their shifts. Interns regularly show compassion and understanding on their calls, as exemplified by numerous student interns who have connected interviewees to healthcare or other supportive services. The remote nature of the internship allows DPH to provide this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to a diverse range of students, including students not geographically located in Southern California, younger to older students, students from diverse cultural, ethnic, racial, economic, linguistic and educational backgrounds—all of whom were unable to engage internship opportunities during the pandemic due to shelter-in-place and other COVID risk requirements/ protections. The internship does not require any more than the students are expected to access for their coursework—such as a computer and high-speed Internet connection, which many IHE have provided to low-income students who otherwise would not be able to continue with their coursework during the pandemic.

**Quality and Productivity Commission**  
**34<sup>th</sup> Annual Productivity and Quality Awards Program**  
**“Leading with Excellence”**

**2021 APPLICATION**

Title of Project (Limited to 50 characters, including spaces, using Arial 12-point font):

**NAME OF PROJECT: COVID-19 CONTACT TRACING STUDENT INTERNSHIP**

**COST AVOIDANCE, COST SAVINGS, AND REVENUE GENERATED (ESTIMATED BENEFITS TO THE COUNTY):** If you are claiming cost benefits, include a calculation on this page. Please indicate whether these benefits apply in total or on a per unit basis, e.g., per capita, per transaction, per case, etc. You must include an explanation of the County cost savings, cost avoidance or new revenue that matches the numbers in the box. Remember to keep your supporting documentation. Use Arial 12-point font

**Cost Avoidance:** Costs that are eliminated or not incurred as a result of program outcomes. Please indicate whether these are costs to the County or to other entities.

**Cost Savings:** A reduction or lessening of expenditures as a result of program outcomes. Please indicate whether these were expenditures by the County or by other entities.

**Revenue:** Increases in existing revenue streams or new revenue sources to the County as a result of program outcomes.

(1) ACTUAL/ESTIMATED ANNUAL COST AVOIDANCE	(2) ACTUAL/ESTIMATED ANNUAL COST SAVINGS	(3) ACTUAL/ESTIMATED ANNUAL REVENUE	(1) + (2) + (3) TOTAL ANNUAL ACTUAL/ESTIMATED BENEFIT	SERVICE ENHANCEMENT PROJECT
\$ <b>2,973,772</b>	\$	\$	\$ <b>2,973,772</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

**ANNUAL = 12 MONTHS ONLY**

The estimated \$3,000,000 in costs avoided by the County was calculated in the following manner:

- 600 interns x 120 internship hours per student = 72,000 total internship hours
- 40 hours per week full-time employment x 52 weeks in a year = 2,080 hours worked in a year by FTE
- 72,000 total internship hours / 2,080 hours worked in a year by FTE = 34.6 (35) FTEs annually
- Using Staff Assistant I and Administrative Assistant I averaged classification salary rates (both Staff Assistants and AAs were an approximate level of staff competency needed to be a contact tracer, based on experience with existing CT DSWs), the hourly rate is \$26.27/hour.
- Using that rate, cost avoidance totals \$2,973,772 annually (using either 72,000 hours annually or annual salaries of 35 FTEs).