



CONNECTING LABORATORIES, STRENGTHENING SKILLS:

The Power of the Peer-to-Peer Learning Program

With support from the US Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Association of Public Health Laboratories (APHL), Regional Consortia allow APHL members to share testing services, expert guidance, and resources with participating laboratories. Grounded in professional relationships and governed by informal agreements, these consortia offer participants many opportunities, including participating in training events, sharing testing resources, utilizing support for APHL/CDC-funded activities, and collaborating on quality improvement topics of regional interest.

One of their key activities is the Peer-to-Peer Learning Program. Since its inception in 2019, this program has enabled laboratory professionals to visit a fellow laboratory, within the same regional consortium for hands-on learning opportunities using APHL travel scholarships.

Peer-to-Peer trips cover a wide range of topics and are flexible to meet the individual needs of each laboratory.

The most common topics include:

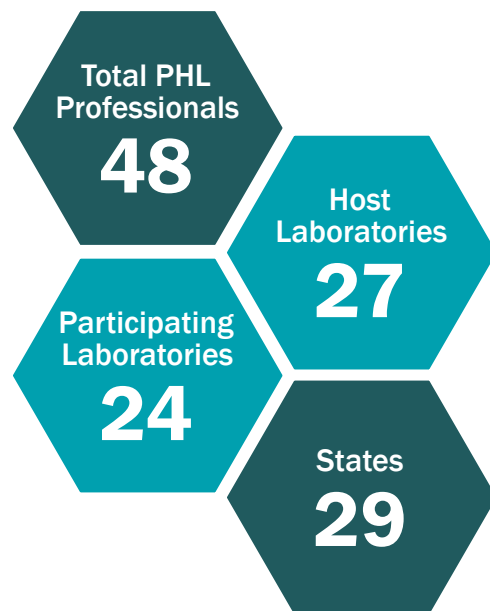
- **Quality, Safety and Preparedness** (examples include: quality management systems, document control, inspection preparation, laboratory accreditation)
- **Testing Services** (examples include: rabies audit, instrumentation, sequencing, culturing and reporting results)
- **Support Services and Operations** (examples include: operations, accessioning, distribution, workforce development)

An analysis of program data, over 40 post-trip reports, and four in-depth interviews showed that participants gained firsthand experiences, professional connections and tangible resources that have lasting benefits.

These findings were developed using a mixed-methods approach, including desk review, participant interviews and thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's framework.

Enhancing Quality, Efficiencies and Capacity

Over 2/3 of responses mentioned how learning about other laboratories' standard operating procedures, policies and methodologies could strengthen quality, safety, efficiencies and capacity in their own laboratory. Examples include: Walking through ISO 18025 accreditation, improving internal audit processes, learning and adapting a non-conformance and corrective action checklist, learning new sequencing platforms, how to more accurately sample and run DNA analysis, improving the cost-effectiveness of HIV testing, among others.



“When I saw [my host laboratory’s] pre-audit readiness checklists, I thought it was awesome. We tailored it to our laboratory and the systems we use; this was very valuable, and [other] teams echoed the same sentiment; it has been beneficial all around.”

— Four Corners and Central Plains Consortium Peer-to-Peer Learning Program participant

Staff Structure and Roles

- Over half of the respondents found it significant to learn how other laboratories structure their staff and what specific staff roles are.
- This included learning about a wide range of staff roles, from administrative, such as reception and data entry, to more technical, like necroscopy. This was especially informative for laboratories exploring the restructuring/expanding of roles and responsibilities.

Highly Engaging and Effective Experience

- Participants appreciated the hands-on participatory learning environment. Results from the post-trip report show that all participants were highly engaged in the program.
- According to the after-trip report, the Peer-to-Peer program prompts action. All participants reported that they had changed or implemented new or improved initiatives at their laboratory after participating in the Peer-to-Peer Learning Program.

Power of Connection

A major outcome of the program was the personal-professional connections participants made. Participants reported growing their professional network and sharing their passion and challenges for public health laboratory sciences, which many described as validating.

“During these peer-to-peer trips, you learn a thousand times more than just a video or webinar... [the trip] was really, really, really productive, I cannot imagine anything substituting for that.”

— Mid Atlantic Consortium Peer-to-Peer Learning Program participant

“Developing a relationship personally and professionally was the biggest impact and the longest-term impact... we continue to rely on each other, we email [questions and resources] back and forth quite often.”

— Mid Atlantic Consortium Peer-to-Peer Learning Program participant

The Regional Consortia’s Peer-to-Peer Program, a highly satisfactory and effective opportunity, has built significant momentum. APHL assists regional consortia by identifying needs and resources and sharing outcomes and best practices with the larger public health laboratory community. Continued support and funding are essential to sustain its impact and reach more public health laboratory professionals.

100%

of respondents had changed or implemented new or improved initiatives at their laboratory after participating in the Peer-to-Peer Learning Program.

97%

of respondents indicated the program improved communication and collaboration.

For more information please visit the **Regional Consortia** website, or email qsa.support@aphl.org.