



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
TENNESSEE  
KNOXVILLE

DEPARTMENT OF  
PUBLIC HEALTH

# Tips for finding and securing an Applied Practice Experience (APEX)

## Internship Resources

- APEX opportunities spreadsheet (ask APEX coordinator for link - must be logged into UTK account to access)
- MPH listserv (field site applications are sent out by the APEX coordinator).
- Consult faculty advisor.
- [Handshake](#)
- Research organizations in your community (non-profits, hospitals, clinics, consulting firms, health departments, university departments/offices).
- [Center for Career Development and Academic Exploration](#) (career fairs, internship guidance).
- Look at the [APEX in Action webpage](#) for examples of past student experiences.
- Network with public health professionals (colleagues, MPH alumni, etc.)

## Contacting Field Organizations

- Prioritize your list of internship options. Who do you want to contact first? Second? Third? It's typical to speak to several field organizations before securing an APEX.
- Start searching and contact sites early. It may take people a while to respond to your email or to set up a meeting/interview. There's never a guarantee that organizations have an opening for an intern or can accommodate your schedule so allow yourself time to hear 'no's', have multiple conversations, and find the right fit for you.
- Don't be afraid to send "cold emails!" Organizations may say no, but don't shy away from asking an organization whether they take interns (even if no information about internships is available on their website) especially if it is an organization you have a vested interest in.
- Keep the subject line simple. Don't be too vague or specific – it can as simple as "Inquiry about [semester] internship opportunities."
- Personalize the email – don't send out a general "template email" to multiple sites. State why you are interested in the organization/experience.
- Ensure that your email is professional and free of spelling and grammatical errors. [Review this guide](#) to writing professional emails.

- Briefly provide information about who you are (e.g., “MPH student in the Community Health Education Concentration at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville”).
- If you were referred to the organization/individual by a mutual connection, mention that in your email (e.g., “I met with my faculty advisor, Dr. Smith, who indicated that you would be a great person to contact for opportunities in xxx”).
- Attach a resume (and include any other information listed on the website or in the APEX opportunities spreadsheet) in the email.
- Make a direct request for a meeting to discuss opportunities further if the organization/individual is open to taking a student intern, and if the experience sounds like a good fit for you based on your interests and career goals. Acknowledge that people are busy, thank them for their time, and be accommodating with their schedule when setting up a time to meet.
- People are busy and sometimes miss emails. Give someone at least seven days to respond and then follow-up.

## Meeting/Interviewing with Field Organizations

- Meetings with field organizations may be more casual or they may be a formal interview, depending on the organization and their process. Approach both professionally – do your research on the organization, prepare questions, be in a quiet meeting space with a good Wi-Fi connection and your camera on (if meeting via Zoom), and be on time.
- Be prepared to speak about the APEX requirements (240 hours, products, competencies, etc.) Use the resources on the [APEX webpage](#) as needed.
- Prepare any specific questions you have about the organization beforehand. You may ask about schedule, format (in-person, hybrid, or remote), how you will be supervised and by who (preceptor), or projects you will work on.
- End the meeting by thanking the individual(s) for their time and confirm next steps. If you are still in the process of speaking with other field organizations or need time to make a decision, be transparent with the organization and provide a reasonable timeline for when you will provide them with a decision.
- If you choose not to pursue an organization you met with, politely decline the opportunity and thank them for taking the time to meet with you. Do not “ghost” an organization.

## Sample APEX Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your interests, objectives, and goals for the internship experience (this is often the main question/concern).
2. What attracted you to the organization? What do you know about the organization?
3. How has your area of concentration (CHE, HPM, EPI, Nutrition, VPH) prepared you for the type of work you will be doing in the organization? [Hint-Review the PH Core and Concentration Competencies for answering this.]
4. What is your plan after graduation? Where do you see yourself in 5 years? 10 years?
5. What is your ideal work environment?
6. What are your strengths? Weaknesses?
7. What are you expecting or hoping to gain from this internship? Why do you believe working for the organization would be useful for your career development and goals?

8. How does your work or volunteer history tie into the organization's culture, focus, or requisite skills and knowledge? They may ask about specific experiences or for a "walkthrough" of your resume.
9. Behavioral questions (e.g., "tell me about a time..."). This may be about an accomplishment, challenge, how you handle difficult situations, how you manage your time/schedule, etc.

## Sample Questions to Ask Organizations

1. What qualities does a successful intern in your organization possess?
2. How can an intern get the most out of this experience?
3. What does a typical day look like in your organization (start/end time, types of tasks)?
4. Tell me about the organizational culture?
5. Do you have a specific student workspace? Would I have a computer, etc?
6. Where do most interns end up working after their internship with you?
7. How much collaboration would I have with other interns or employees?
8. What does the onboarding/orientation process look like for new interns?
9. What does mentorship and professional development look like in your organization?

## Advice From Former MPH Students

"During my phone interview, they asked me to describe my MPH courses in detail. I was glad I had printed a copy of my academic record to remind me about each course. They were most impressed by the program evaluation coursework since their primary focus is on healthcare efficiency (how to evaluate the hospital to decrease waste). They also asked me detailed questions about my resume, including my database and software experience."

"For my preparation: I was sure to show my enthusiasm for the position in my voice (without desperation...fine line). I was very prepared and knowledgeable about the city, their partners, their methods/approach, and the other details of their organization."

"Be able to talk about the field practice requirements (240 hours; a qualified preceptor; student will develop 3-5 'SMART' Objectives that relate to PH Competencies (3 foundational and two concentration))."

"The biggest thing that helped me was writing practice questions beforehand like why the internship would benefit me. Have questions ready for them. Also, be familiar with new policies and current events pertaining to the organization. That really impressed them!"

"They were really impressed when I said I would treat the internship as a job; would use shadowing/observations for networking; and would develop a mentor-student bond with my preceptor."

## Selecting a Field Organization

- Don't be afraid to "go with your gut." Who made a great impression during the meeting/interview? Who did you feel most comfortable with?
- Consider logistics. What field organization works best with your schedule or offers an environment/format you work best in (e.g., on a team vs. independent, remote vs. in-person).
- Consider professional development. Which organization offers a preceptor who can be available/responsive and who has knowledge/experience to provide mentorship and project guidance? Which organization offers projects that will help you develop or strengthen skills you need for a job after graduation? Which organization offers projects that are meaningful and interesting to you?