

US Public Health Service and Indian Health Service Strategic Priorities to support Engineering and Environmental Health Services that protect American Indian and Alaska Native Community Health

CY2024-CY2030

Strategy Objective: Recommend concrete actions for the USPHS Commissioned Corps to support the Indian Health Service (IHS) improve the recruitment and retention of Public Health Service engineers and environmental health officers to effectively and efficiently utilize the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) P.L. 117-58 funding. Public Health Service Engineer officers would aide in planning, designing, and overseeing construction of projects that will support new and sustain existing access to water and sanitary waste disposal facilities that protect the health of American Indian and Alaska Native communities.

Deliverable: 7-year strategic plan

Strategic Priorities (SP), Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and Action Items (AIs)

SP 1: Immediate Staff Support for Sanitation Facilities Construction Program work at the IHS

KPI 1.1.1: 100 Public Health Service officers activated from the Ready Reserve, voluntarily recalled from retirement, and detailed from non-IHS agencies (combined) by end-of-year 2025.

KPI 1.1.2: 17,800 staff-days supported by Public Health Service officers activated from the ready reserve, voluntarily recalled from retirement, and detailed from non-IHS agencies (combined) by end-of-year 2025.

AI 1.1.a: Activate Ready Reserve officers identified by Commissioned Corps Headquarters (CCHQ) who have the skillsets necessary to meet the needs of the IHS.

AI 1.1.b: Recall Public Health Service Engineer and Environmental Health officers from retirement that are identified by the IHS as having the skillsets needed to complete IHS work, following authorities and duration limits established under CC23.5.3 Recall of Retired Officers to Active Duty.

AI 1.1.c: TDY Public Health Service Engineer and Environmental Health officers identified by the IHS with skillsets needed to support IHS work.

AI 1.1.d: Incentivize Officer Voluntary Participation via TDY assignments to support Sanitation Facilities Construction Program work at the IHS by i) issuing personnel orders for the assignments, ii) examining possibility of providing credit for the assignments as a “deployment” described in CCI241.02 Deployment of Public Health Service officers, and iii) seeking support for issuance of a Special Assignment Award (SAA).

SP 2: Increase Active Duty Engineers and Environmental Health officers at the IHS.

KPI 2.1: Increase the number of engineer and environmental health applicants applying to the USPHS Commissioned Corps by 25% (i.e. 100 applications) by the end of CY2027.

AI 2.1.a: *Targeted and coordinated outreach* to promote engineering and environmental health career opportunities with the USPHS Commissioned Corps:

- i. Highlight engineer and environmental health job opportunity announcements on the USPHS.gov website.
- ii. Increase marketing and targeting of the IHS Loan Repayment Program.
- iii. IHS participation in USPHS Quarterly Outreach Webinars to promote application to the Commissioned Corps and to educate and inform applicants of critical required information needed during the application process.
- iv. Coordinated engineer and environmental health-focused outreach material development between CCHQ and the IHS.
- v. Promotion by the Engineer and Environmental Health Officer Professional Advisory Committees, the use of social media outlets, and other online professional networks by current active-duty engineers and environmental health officers to promote career as a Public Health Service officers and job opportunities.

AI 2.1.b: *Board Certification Incentive Pay:* Review CCI152.02 Engineering and Scientific Career Continuation Pay (ESCCP) policy to determine if changes can be made to provide additional pays for officers serving in a high priority engineering, scientific, technical, or research program in which there is a critical shortage of Public Health Service officers. Policy should authorize pays based on the type of certification held by the Public Health Service officer (e.g. Engineering Master Degree, Master of Public Health, Doctor of Public Health, Professional Engineer (PE), Registered Sanitarian/Registered Environmental Health Specialist, and other Bio-Medical Certifications deemed equivalent by the relevant Chief Professional Officer). Pays should be applicable regardless of years of active-duty service.

AI 2.1.c: *Modify Appointment Standard:* Review the General Appointment Standards CCI 231.01 to determine if the appointment for candidates with the cumulative GPA of a qualifying degree at 2.5 can be allowed.

AI 2.1.d: *Recruiting Assistance Training:* Develop training to educate Regular Corps officers volunteering to support recruitment activities with a goal of ensuring a common understanding of their role and scope limits.

AI 2.1.e: *Associate Recruiter Program:* Re-establish the Associate Recruiter Program (CC23.1) to provide recognition to Public Health Service officers involved in the promotion and recruiting of candidates into the USPHS

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Commissioned Corps. Empower PACs regarding this program and have Chief Professional Officers (CPOs) endorse.

AI 2.1.f: *Revise CCI633.01: (1) Include Engineering and Environmental Health in Special Pays:* Revise CCI633.01 to include engineers and environmental health officers as part of the “select health professionals” to incentivize them to remain on active duty in the Regular Corps through Accession Bonus (AB) and Recruitment Bonus. (2) Implement the use of retention and accession bonuses as well as building out policy changes to ensure that new assignments and transfers are at a minimum 4-year assignments.

AI 2.1.g: *Inter-service Transfers:* Develop a set of communication tactics to clarify options currently available within policies. May include Corps-wide messages, messages to LNOs and website updates. Promote the availability of engineer inter-service transfers via the Society of American Military Engineers.

KPI 2.2: Increase the number of Engineers and Environmental Health officers assigned to the IHS by 40% over FY23 levels (200 officers) by FY29 (280 officers).

AI 2.2.a: *Force Management/Right of First Refusal:* Prioritize duty station placement of new, call to active-duty engineer and environmental health officers in agencies that provide direct public health services to underserved and disadvantaged populations including the IHS and other agencies.

AI 2.2.b: *Streamline Assignment Pay (AP) Eligibility:* Identify and designate all IHS locations as eligible for AP, enabling IHS to approve, effect, and implement AP based on their staffing needs. Examine pay levels.

AI 2.2.c: *IHS will provide community profiles to enhance recruitment materials.* IHS is a unique environment, site visits to the community and information on housing, schools, the local community, etc. are important to families to consider. Specific recruitment materials are important for providing this information and helping to determine which IHS site is best for a particular officer/civilian and their family.

SP 3: Engineer and Environmental Health Officer Retention

KPI 3.1: Support IHS Engineer and Environmental Health officers, with 15 -19 years of service, to reach 20 years or more USPHS Commissioned Corps service time by end-of-year 2028.

AI 3.1.a: *Retention Review Board (RRB) Policy Change:* Modify RRB policy CCI 331.01 to remove the lowest decile as a criterion for RRB recommendation and potential removal and add that prior to any review of an officer by the RRB the Agency’s recommendation is obtained.

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AI 3.1.b: *Isolated Hardship Longevity of Service Medal:* Create a service medal device to recognize longevity of service (i.e. multiple years) of isolated hardship active duty service.

AI 3.1.c: *Service Time Extensions:* Proactively request service extensions, as needed, of the IHS to active duty for Public Health Service officers beginning at 30 years of service to allow up to 33 years of service before mandatory retirement. Assess potential negative impact of mandatory retirement policy slated to go into effect in 2028.

KPI 3.2: Improve the IHS engineer and environmental health officer promotion success rate compared to other Public Health Service Engineer and Environmental Health officers by promotion year 2027.

AI 3.2.a: *Promotion analysis.* Conduct an analysis of engineer and environmental health officer promotion packages to identify factors that may improve promotion success.

AI 3.2.b: *O-4 Promotion Eligibility:* Grandfather all officers on active duty on or before issuance of CCI331.01 Permanent Promotions on 25 September 2023 to be eligible for O-4 promotions at 3 years seniority credit per the previous permanent promotion policy.

AI 3.2.c: *Modifications to Force Distribution and Management (CCD 122.02):* Add Engineers and Environmental Health officer to Section 6-2 c (2) to read: “*May exclude officers who are in the Medical and Dental categories as well as Public Health Service **Engineer** and Environmental Health **officers assigned to the IHS.** However, the number of Medical and Dental, **and as well as Public Health Service **Engineer**** and Environmental Health officers **assigned to the IHS excluded** must not exceed 7 percentage points more than the authorized strengths in Section 6-2.a. and b.”*

AI 3.2.d: *Promotion Precept and Benchmarks Modifications and Improvement:*

- Factor 3 – Career Progression and Potential. CCHQ will continue to provide guidance to promotion boards and/or CPOs on the appropriate instructions and rubric/scoring information on Mission Priority and Mobility buckets 1 – 4 to support engineer and environmental health officer retention and longevity of service. Particularly, the guidance will focus on Buckets 1 – service to underserved and vulnerable populations (i.e. IHS, BOP, DHS-IHSC) and 4 – hazardous duty or isolated hardship location (e.g., IHS).
- Factor 4 – Honor/Integrity/Duty. CCHQ will include instructions to promotions boards/CPOs indicating that the lack of deployments under Factor 4 - Honor/Integrity/Duty Factor is not detrimental to scoring for mission critical officers (Professional Contributions & Services to the USPHS Commissioned Corps [Officership] to “CCHQ managed deployments or **mission critical assignments.**”)

SP 4: Accelerated Commissioning for Engineer and Environmental Health Officer Applicants

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KPI 4.1: Increase the number of Engineer and Environmental Health officer applicants transferred from Applicant Enrollment System (AES) to the Applicant Tracking System (ATS) from 4.5% in CY 2023 to 25% by end of calendar year 2025 (CY 2023 AES included 178 Engineer Applicants and 8 applicants transferred to ATS).

AI 4.1.a: *Improve Communications:* IHS will capture all Civil Service applicants to engineer and environmental health officer job opportunity announcements if the applicant is interested in being considered for appointment as an officer of the USPHS Commissioned Corps. IHS will provide CCHQ the necessary personal identification information of these candidates following their acceptance of an IHS tentative job offer. These applicants will be referred to as IHS Priority Engineer and Environmental Health officer Applicants.

AI 4.1.b: *Early Applicant Information Sharing:* CCHQ will share all applicant information with IHS Commissioned Corps Liaison and the CPO at the point of application.

AI 4.1.c: *Frequent Status Reports:* CCHQ will provide bi-monthly updates on IHS Priority Applicant status to IHS from the point of application to boarding.

AI 4.1.d: *Non-IHS Priority Engineer and Environmental Health officer Applicant Follow-up & Support:* Engineer and environmental health officer Professional Advisory Committees through the Engineer and Environmental Health Officer Chief Professional Officers will provide advice and guidance to non-IHS Priority Engineer and environmental health officer Applicants to aid in the identification of duty assignments of these candidates.

AI 4.1.e: *Early Regular Corps Application:* Allow engineers and environmental health officer to apply to Commissioned Corps up to 1 year before completion of their qualifying degree.

KPI 4.2: Decrease the average ATS time between PHS-1662 requests to Call to Active Duty Orders by 20% from an averaged 177 days to 142 days or less for Engineer and Environmental Health officer candidates by end of calendar year 2025.

AI 4.2.a: *Coordinated Security Clearances:* Commissioned Corps HQ to coordinate with the IHS during the security clearance process for IHS Priority Engineer and Environmental Health officer Applicants.

AI 4.2.b: *Procedural Alignment:* Map onboarding process for both CCHQ and IHS to identify opportunities for efficiencies and align procedures to accelerate accessioning.

AI 4.2.c: *Commissioned Corps Application Modification:* The Commissioned Corps HQ will investigate the possibility of incorporating into the Commissioned Corps application process a step that allows IHS to quickly assess if applicants qualify for direct assignment to IHS under Indian Preference.

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AI 4.2.d: *Processing Time Metrics & Reporting:* Commissioned Corps HQ will develop processing time metrics and targets that breakdown and describe the appointment process. These metrics will be shared with the IHS and the Chief Professional Officer on a quarterly basis.

SP 5: Increasing the Commissioned Corps Engineer and Environmental Health Officer Category Pipeline

KPI 5.1: Increase the number of Engineer and EHO Junior Commissioned Officer Student Training and Extern Program (JRCOSTEP) on-boarded officers at the IHS from an estimated 13 in May/June 2023 to 50 per year by May/June 2028.

AI 5.1.a: *Fast Track Prior COSTEPS:* Commissioned Corps HQ will streamline the boarding process for prior COSTEPS by reducing the steps and forms needed when applying for reappointment as a Regular Corps officer or as returning COSTEPS.

AI 5.1.b: *Application Deadline:* Change application deadline to October 30 (Same as SRCOSTEP Deadline).

AI 5.1.c: *Appointment Standard Changes:* Modify GPA threshold for Engineers and Environmental Health Officers from 2.8 to 2.0 for candidates.

AI 5.1.d: *Early Applicant Information Sharing:* CCHQ will share JRCOSTEP applicant information with IHS Commissioned Corps Liaison upon receiving complete applications (all categories).

AI 5.1.e: *Mentor Program:* The Engineering and Environmental Health Officer Professional Advisory Committees will offer assignment of a mentor to all engineer and environmental health COSTEP officers and follow-up with COSTEP for up to one-year after completion of tour.

AI 5.1.f: *Develop Engineer and EHO Category JRCOSTEP Factsheets:* CCHQ with the support of IHS, the Environmental Health Officer Professional Advisory Committee, and the Engineering Professional Advisory Committee will develop process factsheet to help communicate eligibility, application requirements, and timeframes to agency hiring managers and applicants.

AI 5.1.g: *Increase Promotional Outreach:* Leverage Engineering and Environmental Health Officer Professional Advisory Committee and IHS Advocates utilizing CC HQ approved marketing resources and tools (e.g. Handshake) to promote program.

AI 5.1.h: *Assess feasibility of allowing students to apply earlier in their academic careers and identify pathway for implementing this change.*

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KPI 5.2: Increase the number of Engineer and Environmental Health Officer Senior Commissioned Officer Student Training and Extern Program (SRCOSTEP) on-boarded officers at the IHS from 0 in 2023 to 10 per year by end-of-year 2028.

AI 5.2.a: *Early Applicant Information Sharing:* CCHQ will share SRCOSTEP applicant information with IHS Commissioned Corps Liaison upon receiving complete applications (all categories).

AI 5.2.b: *Develop Engineer and Environmental Health Officer Category SRCOSTEP Factsheet:* CCHQ with the support of IHS and the Engineering and Environmental Health Officer Professional Advisory Committees (as needed) will develop process factsheet to help communicate eligibility, application requirements, and timeframes to agency hiring managers and applicants.

AI 5.2.c: *Increase Promotional Outreach:* Leverage Engineering and Environmental Health Officer Professional Advisory Committees and IHS Ambassadors utilizing approved marketing resources and tools (e.g. Handshake) to promote program.

AI 5.2.d: *Assess feasibility of allowing students to apply earlier in their academic careers and identify pathway for implementing this change.*