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Project Title: Clinical Laboratory Focus Group Feedback on DLS Professional Development Service Offerings

Focus Group Guide

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Introduction and Consent (8 minutes)

Good morning/afternoon/evening. Thank you for volunteering to speak with us about your experience with CDC laboratory training and professional development offerings. My name is [INSERT NAME] and I will be facilitating our discussion today. My colleague [INSERT NAME] will be taking notes. We are from Booz Allen Hamilton and are conducting these interviews on behalf of CDC's Division of Laboratory Systems. Before we begin the discussion, I would like to provide a bit of background about the goals of this session.

CDC's Division of Laboratory Systems provides a wide-range of training resources and professional development opportunities for laboratory professionals. We are conducting focus groups with laboratory bench staff and interviews with laboratory leadership to understand how CDC can make laboratory training and other professional development opportunities more accessible, effective, and tailored to staff like you. During this focus group, we would like to explore if and how you currently use CDC laboratory training and professional development resources to address current and prospective knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to do your job.

This focus group will last about 60 minutes. Your participation is voluntary as stated in the *Informed Consent* form that you signed. You do not have to answer any question that you do not feel comfortable answering. There are no right or wrong answers to any of these questions. We want to know your opinions, and those opinions might differ. This is fine. We are interested in both majority and minority viewpoints, common and uncommon experiences. We greatly appreciate your honesty and openness, so we can paint as accurate a picture as possible. I may sometimes act as a traffic cop by encouraging someone who has been quiet to talk or by asking someone who has been particularly engaged to hold off for a few minutes.

We would like to record our conversation today simply to ensure the accuracy of our notes and final report. Both the audio recording and the written notes will be kept in a secure location. The audio recording will be destroyed once the notes are deemed accurate. We will remove any identifying information from the notes and our final report for your confidentiality. In addition, we ask that you also respect the confidentiality of everyone in this room. Please do not repeat who said what when you leave this room.

Do you have any questions about the focus group? Do we have your permission to record our discussion and proceed?



Background (5 minutes)

Before we begin, we would like to provide definitions for a few terms that we will use frequently during our discussion.

- **Definition of Training:** When we mention training, we are referring to both informal (e.g., on-the-job instruction) or formal (e.g., a lecture-based course, a hands-on workshop, an eLearning/virtual course) trainings. *Source: CDC Quality Training Standards*
 - Please know that some of these trainings are done in collaboration with APHL (the Association of Public Health Laboratories), and others are not. Trainings are available at www.cdc.gov/labtraining
 - CDC Trainings and Training Resources such as:
 - Basic/introductory e-learning courses in microbiology (e.g., “Routine Microscopy Procedures”), molecular biology (e.g., “PCR and Real-time PCR”), and laboratory informatics (e.g., “Life of a Specimen”)
 - Safety eLearning courses (e.g., “Fundamentals of Centrifuge Safety”, “Fundamentals of Chemical Fume Hood Safety”, and “Fundamentals of Working Safely in a Biological Safety Cabinet”)
 - Packaging and shipping seminars held locally in public health laboratories around the country
 - In-person “hands-on” workshops held in CDC’s Training Lab in Atlanta (Topics: TB, PFGE, Mycology, PFGE Sequencing, Parasitology)
 - The 2015 CDC-APHL Competency Guidelines for laboratory professionals
- **Definition of Professional Development:** Though training is a kind of professional development activity, when we use the term “professional development”, we are referring to activities other than training, activities such as internships, fellowships, mentoring, temporary job assignments, leadership development programs and resources, etc. [By “fellowships”, we are referring to *post-Masters* or *post-doctoral* (e.g., PhD, ScD) programs that are typically 1- or 2-year experiences that train individuals in public health laboratory practice (e.g., APHL-CDC Laboratory Fellowships, CDC’s Laboratory Leadership Service) or clinical laboratory practice (e.g., ASM’s CPEP program). We are not referring to fellowships that are completed by MDs after their clinical residencies nor to clinical rotations or internships completed by MLT or MLS students as part of their degree program]. *Source: CDC*
- **Definition of New Staff:** Where we mention new staff, we are referring to individuals who are either new to being employed as a laboratory professional or those who are simply new to their current employer. So, these are likely recent graduates who have been working in a laboratory less than one or two years OR they could be more seasoned/experienced staff who recently got a job with a different employer and so are “new” to that laboratory organization.



Focus Group Questions (45 minutes)

Let's start by getting to know one another. Please tell us your name, which laboratory you are from, and how long you have worked in a clinical laboratory setting.

Section I: Utilization of Training and Professional Development Resources (10 minutes)

First, we would like to get a better understanding of how you use CDC training resources and professional development opportunities.

1. Tell me about the CDC trainings and professional development resources that you're aware of.
2. Among these, which CDC training resources or professional development opportunities have you used?
[Probes (if needed)]
 - [Restate Training Resources mentioned in Q#1 above]
 - How are the training resources used by new staff compared to more experienced staff? (i.e., equally, more, less)
3. How effective are current CDC training resources and professional development opportunities in meeting your workforce development needs?
[Probes (if needed)]
 - What does "effective" mean to you when assessing these resources and opportunities?
 - Do you supplement CDC training resources or professional development opportunities with additional content or activities? If so, please explain which trainings and professional development opportunities you have had to supplement and why.

Section II: Current and Prospective Gaps (20 minutes)

We would like to understand how you use CDC trainings and professional development offerings to address current and prospective knowledge, skills, and abilities you want and/or need to improve.

4. How do you determine which CDC trainings and professional development opportunities to take advantage of? Please describe the key factors involved in your decision.
[Probes (if needed)]
 - Build particular knowledge, skills, and abilities (i.e., relevance/address competency gaps)
 - Required
 - Convenience
 - Credibility of the developer/provider
 - Cost
 - PACE or other continuing education credit available
5. What knowledge, skills, and abilities do you see yourself most frequently seeking CDC training resources and professional development opportunities for?
[Probes (if needed)]
 - [Refer to Training Resources mentioned in Qs #1-4 above]
 - [Refer to Professional Development Opportunities mentioned in Qs #1-4 above]
6. What would you say are the most critical gaps in CDC training and professional development offerings?



[Probes (if needed)]

- Technical (e.g., fundamental testing techniques or skills, informatics)
- Technology (e.g., new assay platforms, advancements in automation)
- Workforce changes (e.g., retirements, low retention rates, or staff advancing to managerial/leadership positions)
- Do these gaps differ for new staff versus more experienced staff?

7. How can CDC better support your training and professional development needs, to address the most critical gaps such as [restate what participants say in Q#7]?

[Probes (if needed)]

- What workforce development programs/initiatives would you like to see?
- What workforce development challenges would you like to see CDC get (more) engaged in helping solve?

Section III: Facilitators and Barriers (10 minutes)

Let's talk about the challenges, those things that make it hard to participate in CDC laboratory trainings and professional development opportunities.

8. What would you say are the challenges to participating in CDC training or professional development opportunities?

[Probes (if needed)]

- Awareness (e.g., not always aware of what's available)
- Time constraints (e.g., high workloads)
- Cost constraints (e.g., travel is required for hands-on workshops).
 - Who is responsible for paying costs?
- Managerial or organizational support constraints (e.g., negative view of the offering or of taking time off)
- Relevance (e.g., types of trainings are not adequate or relevant to your job)
- Access limitations (e.g., travel required, low frequency, requires high-speed Internet access, CDC TRAIN access or performance issues)

Now let's talk about the factors that make it easy to select and engage in CDC laboratory trainings and professional development opportunities.

9. What would you say are the factors that positively influence your decision to participate in a particular CDC training or professional development opportunity?

[Probes (if needed)]

- Time (e.g., no travel required, working hours allowed for training and professional development, allotted training hours for training and professional development)
- Cost (e.g., training is free, needed travel is paid for by employer or APHL)
- Organizational Support (e.g., trainings are promoted or recommended by employer)
- Managerial Support (e.g., managers who value training and innovation, education/training objectives included in performance reviews)
- Access (e.g., high frequency of trainings, types of trainings)
- Peer involvement (e.g., opportunities to engage with peers from other clinical laboratories)

Section IV: Closing (5 minutes)



10. Before we wrap up today's discussion, is there anything else that anyone would like to add?

Wrap Up and Thank You (2 minutes)

Thank you for your time and valuable insights. Your participation will help CDC make training and professional development opportunities that better meet the needs of clinical laboratory staff. If you have any further questions regarding our conversation today, please contact our team at [INSERT EMAIL]. Enjoy the rest of the [day/conference/training, as applicable].