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Project Initiation

Project Data for Accession Number 1035019

Project Title

Strengthening the Regulatory Veterinary Workforce: Experiential Training Pathways for State-Based, Public-Service Veterinary Practice

Project Details

Sponsoring Institution National Institute of Food and Agriculture	Project Status ACTIVE
Funding Source NIFA Non Formula	Grant Year 2026
Grant No. 2026-70514-46951	Cumulative Award Amt. \$299,979.00
Proposal No. 2026-05407	Multistate No. (N/A)
Project Start Date Sep 15, 2026	Project End Date Sep 14, 2029
Program Code [VSGPE] Veterinary Services Grant Program Education Grants	

Project Director

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Recipient Organization

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE DEPARTMENTS OF AGRICULTURE RESEARCH FOUNDATION
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Performing Department

(N/A)

Non Technical Summary

The United States faces a persistent shortage of veterinarians in food animal and regulatory practice, particularly in rural communities and state government systems. These veterinarians are important because they help detect animal diseases, respond to disease outbreaks, carry out animal health laws and programs, protect the food supply, and support U.S. agriculture. Through Strengthening the Regulatory Veterinary Workforce: Experiential Training Pathways for State-Based, Public-Service Veterinary Practice, the NASDA Foundation will strengthen the veterinary workforce pipeline by increasing veterinary students' exposure to and preparation for food animal, regulatory, and public-service veterinary careers. Regulatory veterinary medicine includes work within government agencies to monitor animal health, prevent and respond to disease, carry out animal health requirements, and protect animals, agriculture, and the public. Over three years, the project will recruit, select, and place nine veterinary students in 10- to 12-week

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internships within State Veterinarian offices serving identified or at-risk veterinary shortage areas. Students will receive hands-on training in disease monitoring, emergency response, animal health program implementation, regulatory decision-making, and work with producers and other animal health partners. Students will also receive mentoring and participate in national professional development opportunities to expand their understanding of regulatory veterinary careers and build professional networks. The project will measure changes in students' knowledge, skills, and career interests and will track their career pathways for at least one year after participation. The project is expected to increase student knowledge and competency in regulatory veterinary medicine and increase interest in careers serving food animal, public-service, and veterinary shortage needs. Ultimately, the project will establish and evaluate a state-based training model that can be expanded to additional students and states, helping build a stronger veterinary workforce to support animal health, disease preparedness, food safety, and the resilience of the U.S. agricultural system.

Animal Health Component

Animal Health Component: 100%

Research Effort Categories

Basic	0%
Applied	0%
Developmental	0%

Classification

Knowledge Area (KA)	Subject of Investigation (SOI)	Field of Science (FOS)	Percent
311	6010	3020	100%

Knowledge Area

[311] Animal Diseases

Subject Of Investigation

[6010] Individuals (as workers, consumers, members of society)

Field Of Science

[3020] Education

Keywords

Veterinary shortage; food animal; regulatory workforce; experiential training; rural vet

Goals / Objectives

Major GoalThe major goal of this project is to strengthen the national veterinary workforce pipeline by increasing veterinary students' exposure to and preparation for careers in food animal, regulatory, and public-service veterinary practice. Through structured experiential learning within state animal health programs, the project will build student knowledge and competencies, increase awareness of career opportunities in veterinary shortage areas, and

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strengthen pathways into positions that support animal health, disease preparedness, food safety, and the resilience of the U.S. agricultural system. Objectives Recruit, select, and place nine veterinary students over the three-year project period in structured, full-time internship experiences within State Veterinarian offices, with three students participating annually and placements emphasizing identified or at-risk veterinary shortage areas. Increase participant knowledge and competency in regulatory veterinary medicine through hands-on experience in areas including disease surveillance, emergency response, animal health program implementation, regulatory decision-making, and stakeholder engagement. Progress will be assessed through pre- and post-program assessments and mentor evaluations. Increase awareness of and interest in public-service, food animal, and regulatory veterinary careers, with a target of at least 75 percent of participants reporting increased interest in public-service career pathways following completion of the internship. Strengthen participants' professional networks and understanding of the broader animal health system through mentorship and engagement in national professional development opportunities, including participation in the NASDA Annual Meeting and the joint USAHA/NASAHO Annual Meeting. Evaluate the effectiveness of structured experiential learning as a veterinary workforce development strategy by measuring participant learning, competency development, career intentions, and subsequent career or educational pathways. Participants will be tracked for a minimum of one year following program completion to assess continued engagement in public, food animal, regulatory, or veterinary shortage-area career pathways. Together, these objectives will establish and evaluate a coordinated, state-based experiential training model that can inform future efforts to expand the pipeline of veterinarians prepared to serve critical animal health and public-service workforce needs.

Project Methods

The project will use a structured, experiential workforce-development model to increase veterinary students' knowledge of, competency in, and interest in food animal, regulatory, and public-service veterinary practice. Over the three-year project period, three veterinary students will be recruited and placed annually in State Veterinarian offices for a total of nine participants. Recruitment and Selection The NASDA Foundation will conduct national recruitment in coordination with veterinary colleges, State Animal Health Officials, professional organizations, faculty, administrators, and veterinary student organizations. Outreach will emphasize students with demonstrated interest in food animal medicine, regulatory veterinary medicine, public health, or rural practice. Applicants will be selected through a competitive process considering academic performance, relevant interests and experiences, leadership potential, and alignment with project objectives. Participating State Animal Health Officials will provide input to support appropriate alignment between students and host sites. Experiential Learning and Internship Implementation Each selected student will complete a full-time, 10-12 week summer internship within a State Veterinarian office. A standardized competency framework will guide the experience across participating states while allowing individual host offices to tailor activities to state-specific animal health priorities and regulatory responsibilities. Experiential learning activities will include exposure to disease surveillance, emergency response planning and implementation, regulatory program administration, animal movement oversight, compliance activities, stakeholder engagement, and regulatory decision-making. Depending on the host location and current animal health priorities, students may participate in livestock operation visits, disease response exercises, animal health data analysis, regulatory activities, and interactions with producers, industry representatives, and federal partners. Each student will be assigned a State Animal Health Official, State Veterinarian, or designated senior staff member as a mentor. Mentors will provide supervision, facilitate applied learning opportunities, conduct regular progress discussions, and evaluate student competency in core areas of regulatory veterinary practice. Professional Development and National Engagement State-based experiential learning will be supplemented with national professional development opportunities. Participating students will attend the NASDA Annual Meeting and the joint United States Animal Health Association/National Assembly of State Animal Health Officials Annual Meeting. These activities will expose students to state agricultural leadership, animal health policy, emerging disease issues, veterinary science, regulatory systems, and professional networks. Combining state-level practice with national engagement is intended to provide students with both applied experience and an understanding of the broader animal health system. Program Coordination The NASDA Foundation will coordinate recruitment, student placement, host-site communication, professional development, evaluation, data collection, and reporting. Standardized program guidelines, reporting tools, and data collection protocols will be used to promote

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consistency across participating states. Regular communication with host sites will allow the project team to monitor implementation, address challenges, and incorporate lessons learned into subsequent cohorts. A significant feature of the project is its coordinated multi-state approach. Rather than providing isolated internship experiences, the project will apply a common competency framework, structured mentoring, national professional development, and consistent evaluation across host states. This design will allow the project to assess the effectiveness of a model that can be refined and potentially replicated in additional states. Evaluation and Analysis Evaluation will measure changes in participant knowledge, competencies, career interest, professional engagement, and progression toward food animal, regulatory, public-service, and veterinary shortage-area careers. Baseline data will be collected from all participants before the internship to assess knowledge of regulatory veterinary medicine, familiarity with public-service career pathways, and career intentions. Following the internship, participants will complete post-program assessments using comparable measures to evaluate changes in knowledge, competencies, and career interest. Quantitative indicators of success will include: Placement of nine veterinary students, with three participants annually; Engagement of approximately three to six state host sites; An average increase of at least 30 percent in participant knowledge based on pre- and post-program assessments; At least 80 percent of participants demonstrating competency in core regulatory veterinary areas based on mentor evaluations; At least 75 percent of participants reporting increased interest in public-service veterinary careers; At least 60 percent pursuing additional relevant educational, experiential, or professional opportunities within six months; At least 40 percent entering or indicating an intention to enter a veterinary shortage-area or related career pathway within 12 months; At least 50 percent remaining engaged in a relevant pathway one year after participation; and At least 85 percent positive satisfaction among participating State Veterinarians and host offices. Quantitative data will be analyzed using descriptive and comparative methods, including paired comparisons of pre- and post-program measures. Qualitative information will be collected through participant reflections, follow-up interviews, and feedback from State Veterinarians and host offices. Qualitative data will be reviewed thematically to identify patterns related to student learning, career decision-making, program effectiveness, and barriers or facilitators to entering public veterinary practice. Mentor-based competency assessments will provide an additional measure of student skill development beyond participant self-report. Data will be anonymized for analysis where appropriate, and findings will be considered in relation to national veterinary workforce information and existing literature to provide context for observed results. Participants will be tracked for a minimum of one year following program completion to document employment status, practice type, continued educational or professional activities, and involvement in veterinary shortage-area pathways. Evaluation findings will be reviewed annually to refine recruitment, internship structure, mentoring, and professional development activities for subsequent cohorts. Final findings will be used to assess the effectiveness of the experiential training model and inform recommendations for future replication and expansion.