



Meet the Fellow

Want to be featured in a future Meet the Fellow?

[Contact Us!](#)

McKenzie Mullis

Host Laboratory: Ohio Department of Agriculture
Animal Disease Diagnostics Laboratory

Degree of Study: Master's in Health Communication

Graduation: 2023

School: Boston University



Tell us about your educational background?

I have a Bachelor's in Biology from the University of North Georgia, a Masters in Biology Research from Georgia State University, and a Masters in Health Communication from Boston University.

What brought you into laboratory science?

I have always had a strong passion for science and hands-on laboratory work, which initially led me to pursue a career in biotechnology. Over time, however, I discovered that my interests aligned more closely with the broader impact of public health.

How did you hear about the Public Health Laboratory Fellowship Program?

One of my teammates at US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) was an APHL fellow and he recommended I apply for the program.

How did this fellowship match or exceed your expectations?

The fellowship program has far exceeded my expectations by providing resources and support well beyond what is typically offered in similar programs. It stands out for its strong emphasis on professional development, offering a wide range of opportunities such as training sessions, networking events, and mentorship. One of the most valuable aspects is the accessibility and responsiveness of the Fellowship Team, whenever questions arise or assistance is needed. There is always someone available to provide help. This level of support has impacted both my personal and professional growth.

Tell us what you learned from your mentor.

My mentor has provided fantastic insight into the operations of diagnostic and state-run laboratories, offering perspective on both their strengths and challenges. Through our discussions, I have gained a deeper understanding of critical issues such as funding limitations, workforce morale, and the complexities involved in managing disease outbreaks like Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI). Additionally, my mentor emphasized the essential role these laboratories play in safeguarding animal health, which ultimately contributes to public health and food security. This experience has broadened my appreciation for the interconnectedness of science, policy, and practical implementation in the field of animal health.

Tell us about your project assignments/laboratory roles.

My project focuses on restructuring and modernizing the laboratory's safety documentation and training programs to ensure compliance and enhance operational efficiency. As the laboratory prepares to transition into a new facility, I am collaborating closely with staff to review and update critical materials, including risk assessments, standard operating

procedures (SOPs), and work instructions. In addition, I am developing new training modules designed to improve safety awareness and streamline onboarding for current and future personnel. This initiative not only supports a smooth transition to the new space but also strengthens the lab's overall safety culture.

How has your fellowship experience inspired you?

Moving my career outside the laboratory has been a game-changer. It's shown me how much impact I can have through writing, communication, and improving processes. I want to use my science background and creativity to help laboratories share why their work matters, not just with the public, but with their clients too. Clear communication can make a huge difference. One day I want to help people understand the value of testing and regulations, building trust, and even making the diagnostic process run more smoothly. My goal is to take complex scientific ideas and make them easy to understand so that public health efforts are stronger and more efficient. At the end of the day, I want to help create a system where good communication supports compliance, efficiency, and the bigger mission of protecting health.

How would you describe the Fellowship to other students?

The APHL Fellowship program is an incredible opportunity for anyone passionate about public health. It offers hands-on experience across a wide range of areas, including animal health, human health, research, regulatory work, and other specialized public health laboratory fields. What makes this program stand out is the diversity of experiences you can gain, whether you're interested in disease prevention, diagnostics, or policy, there's a chance to explore it here. It's a great way to build practical skills, connect with experts in the field, and see firsthand how public health laboratories play a critical role in protecting communities.

Aside from the laboratory and the science, did you gain any other beneficial life experiences?

One of the biggest opportunities this fellowship gave me was the push I needed to move out of Georgia. Taking the leap to relocate on my own has been a huge growth experience, it's taught me independence and given me the confidence to know I can live anywhere, find a job, and adapt without fear. That alone has been life changing. On top of that, being able to attend conferences has been an incredible benefit. I've learned so much from experts in the field, and the chance to network with people who have the jobs I aspire to is inspiring and motivating. Those connections and experiences have shown me what's possible and helped me envision the next steps in my career.