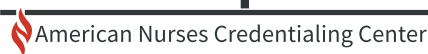


Advanced Practice Provider Fellowship Accreditation



CASE STUDY: Building a Sustainable Advanced Practice Provider Fellowship Intermountain Health's Journey to APPFA Accreditation

BACKGROUND

Advanced practice providers (APPs), including APRNs and PAs, are vital to expanding access to high-quality care. For organizations facing provider shortages, complex care needs, and high new-graduate turnover, structured fellowships support a smoother transition to independent practice.

Intermountain Health launched a 12-month APP fellowship in Nevada in 2019 to strengthen its primary care workforce and support newly graduated APPs. The program prepares fellows for complex primary care, senior care, documentation, coding, quality measures, teamwork, and long-term practice within the organization.

The program later pursued APPFA accreditation through ANCC to validate quality, strengthen internal structures, and demonstrate the value of APP fellowship education to leaders and future applicants.

CHALLENGES

"We had a 29% first year turnover for all APPs. So we could not keep a single APP into, you know, continuing on."

- **High APP turnover:** First-year APP turnover was 29%, affecting clinic stability, care continuity, and workforce reliability.
- **Provider shortages:** Nevada's limited primary care workforce and underserved communities required a stronger pipeline beyond traditional recruitment.
- **Transition-to-practice needs:** New APPs needed structured mentorship, specialty exposure, and gradual patient-volume increases to build confidence and competence.
- **Accreditation preparation:** After pausing in 2021, the team had to update documentation, organize evidence, and align the application with current APPFA expectations.
- **Sustainability:** The program needed shared ownership and clear accountability to maintain accreditation readiness over time.

SOLUTIONS AND STRATEGIES

Intermountain Health used a focused set of strategies to strengthen and accredit its APP fellowship:

- **Align training with workforce needs:** The 12-month fellowship included a three-year commitment and was planned around future openings, retirements, specialty growth, and clinic needs.
- **Structure clinical progression:** Fellows gradually advanced from about 25% to full patient loads while rotating through primary care, senior care, urgent care, cardiology, dermatology, and other specialties.
- **Support fellows and retention:** Faculty provided regular coaching on clinical care, documentation, coding, quality measures, and complex care, supported by wellness resources, PTO, continuing education, and no call requirements.
- **Strengthen recruitment:** Recruitment began five to six months before the start date and included fellowship-specific materials, references, personal statement, CV or resume, video response, and structured interview day.
- **Manage accreditation with discipline:** The team used project management support, a timeline, Gantt chart, assigned responsibilities, regular meetings, and external reviewers to keep the application clear and complete.
- **Build from standards and control documentation:** APPFA standards guided program design over time, while one person managed documentation consistency and an internal deadline allowed time for review.
- **Prepare and sustain readiness:** The team used a mock site visit, assigned talking points, faculty support, monthly team meetings, and quarterly faculty reviews to maintain accountability and continuous improvement.

RESULTS

The APP fellowship delivered clear workforce, retention, and organizational benefits:

- **Improved retention:** First-year APP retention increased from about 71% to 96%, and 89% of fellows stayed beyond the required post-fellowship commitment.
- **Stronger workforce pipeline:** Fellows were trained for planned roles, reducing workforce uncertainty and supporting continuity of care.
- **Accreditation distinction:** The program became the first APPFA-accredited program within Intermountain Health and the only APPFA-accredited program spanning Nevada and Utah at the time of the webinar.
- **Greater organizational engagement:** Leaders, faculty, recruiters, and operational stakeholders became more connected to the fellowship's purpose and value.

OUTCOMES

The case highlights broader takeaways for nurse leaders and residency or fellowship program leaders:

“The fellowship really makes a difference. Like I said, we had a 71% retention prior to fellowship. Now we’re about at 96% and all the fellows that we’ve kept, we’ve kept them at 89% beyond the contract that we asked them to stay.”

- **Validated quality:** Accreditation helps strong programs confirm quality, identify gaps, and align with recognized standards.
- **Improved retention:** Structured fellowships support preparedness, confidence, and connection to the organization.
- **Stronger operations:** Accreditation encourages clearer roles, documentation, goals, outcome tracking, and regular review.
- **Leadership buy-in:** Linking fellowship outcomes to workforce needs, access, retention, and continuity helps position the program as a strategic investment.
- **Sustainable readiness:** With planning, shared ownership, and continuous improvement, accreditation readiness can be maintained over time.

CONCLUSION

Intermountain Health’s APPFA accreditation journey shows how a structured fellowship can strengthen transition-to-practice, improve workforce stability, and demonstrate organizational value. For nurse leaders, the case highlights APPFA as a strategic framework for building credible, sustainable programs that support APP development and retention.

LESSONS LEARNED

Lesson	Application
Start early	Use accreditation standards to guide program design and improvement before applying.
Manage the work as a project	Set timelines, assign responsibilities, use project management support, and maintain accountability.
Engage reviewers	Include program insiders and outside reviewers to strengthen clarity and completeness.
Control documentation	Assign one person to manage evidence, consistency, and submission, with an internal deadline before the official due date.
Prepare for the site visit	Ensure fellows, faculty, and leaders know the application, understand their roles, and participate in a mock visit.
Sustain readiness	Maintain progress through regular meetings, documentation review, goal tracking, and continuous improvement.

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