



## **Community Health Worker National Education Collaborative Key Considerations**

All project partners in the Community Health Worker National Education Collaborative (CHW-NEC) are at various stages in the implementation and evaluation of their CHW curriculum for their respective institutions of higher education. The role of the Advisory Council is to help advise project partners in these various stages, so that their CHW college-supported educational programs are truly responsive and representative of the past, present, and future of CHWs as well as addressing community and employer needs.

The CHW-NEC recognizes that both paid and volunteer CHWs work throughout the U.S. promoting health and access to care in their communities.<sup>1</sup> Educational programs should strive to serve these existing CHWs and new community members who wish to serve as CHWs.

First and foremost, from the viewpoint of the Advisory Council, the integration of CHWs at all levels in program planning, implementation, and evaluation will provide the strongest foundation for creating a truly responsive educational program that builds on the CHWs' knowledge of the communities where they live and work. Every opportunity in program development and implementation must be taken to ensure the voice of CHWs is not lost.

Overall, the Advisory Council recommends integrating the most promising practice approaches identified by the CHW-NEC in order to develop a balanced program responsive to workforce needs. The CHW-NEC has identified seven Promising Practice areas organized around key steps in the development of a CHW program (A-G below). The Advisory Council has identified ten key considerations that fall under these seven areas. The combined list is presented here.

---

<sup>1</sup> As an emerging workforce in Public Health, a clear definition of the contemporary roles and competencies of CHWs is still evolving. The CHW-NEC looks forward to leadership from CHWs in the field currently working to develop a formal definition and will share such a definition with all project partners as it is made public.

## **Promising Practice Areas and Key Considerations for CHW Education**

### **I. Program Development**

#### **A. Workforce Assessment and Market Development**

1. Community health workers (students) need external support for education especially from current and future employers.

#### **B. Institutional Climate and Program Development**

2. College-supported education for CHWs must take into account various student/faculty backgrounds and integrate these into program design and anticipate the impact CHW education will have once they graduate.

### **II. Program Implementation**

#### **C. Curriculum Design**

3. Offering a diverse curriculum addressing learning styles for both community and classroom experience is essential as well as promoting core CHW competencies.

#### **D. Instructional Approaches**

4. Focus on effective instructional approaches that engage students becoming CHWs and CHWs becoming students.

#### **E. Recruitment and Retention**

5. There are various barriers to address especially during the orientation process in order to assure student success.
6. Life and work experiences need to be honored...seek opportunities to give credit where credit is due.
7. Career building incentives must be varied and need to lead to other opportunities.

### **III. Program Evaluation**

#### **F. Evaluation Process**

8. Evaluation processes are important to establishing and refining program success; they must be multi-level and on-going using a variety of assessment tools—using classroom assessments/tests/measures, workplace assessments, satisfaction surveys, and the like.

### **IV. Program Maintenance**

#### **G. Program Sustainability**

9. Sustainability efforts are needed and must address a wide range of levels, including student and institutional needs in college-supported educational programs.
10. Policy and advocacy are an integral part of developing and implementing successful CHW educational programs. Skills in these areas should be developed in faculty, staff, and students to promote the educational program and the well being of the communities served by the CHWs.

The following example is intended to facilitate the review of the attached document prepared by the Advisory Council for CHW NEC partner review. The example depicts how each Promising Practice and Key Consideration is presented.

- A. Promising Practice Area**  
**1. Specific Key Consideration pertaining to this practice area**  
 i) **Sub-categories of key consideration**
- Details regarding item

## **I. PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT**

### **A. Workforce Assessment and Market Development**

Workforce assessment and market development includes exploring the current employment market, workforce policy, and financial climate for CHWs as well as identifying and developing volunteer and paid CHW positions in the college service area. College-supported CHW educational programs must play an active role in assessing the availability of and opportunities for CHW jobs in their service area. Program staff should anticipate playing an active role in the development of the CHW field overall into a more sustainable component of the health workforce. College staff too must explore ways to link education to promotion opportunities within existing CHW employment sites.

#### **1) Community health workers (students) need external support for education especially from current and future employers.**

Collaborating agencies involved in the process include:

- i) The Learning Institution offering:
  - Flexible Hours
  - Scholarships
  - Support Services (Childcare, transport assistance, alternative community-based sites for classes)
- ii) Local Health Departments offering:
  - Technical Assistance regarding community assets/needs
- iii) Funding Sources offering:
  - Support for students, faculty, and staff
- iv) Work Environments offering:
  - Flexible hours
  - Tuition reimbursement
  - Continuation/Advancement within the work place

### **B. Institutional Climate and Program Development**

Program development and institutional climate includes a comprehensive set of activities to aid in refining the overall CHW educational program development, implementation, and evaluation at the educational institution. It is important that every college-supported CHW educational program integrate involvement from experienced CHWs in their program at every stage through inclusion of CHWs as planners, faculty, and student mentors to meet their institution's and community's needs.

**2) College-supported education for CHWs must take into account various student/faculty backgrounds and integrate these into program design and anticipate the impact CHW education will have once they graduate.**

CHWs must be involved in all stages of program planning, implementation, and evaluation.

- i) CHWs can aid college administration in:
  - Planning and developing curriculum specifically to meet the needs of the region and the communities served
  - Establishing internship and mentorship programs within health-related agencies
  - Evaluating the implementation process including measuring the impact on students and the community
- ii) Programs should promote and support CHWs as faculty.
- iii) Programs should develop CHW leadership in the curriculum—possibly expanding mechanisms for CHWs to gain specialized teaching certification as needed (as well as addressing long-term teaching objectives) that promote CHWs at the helm as faculty.

CHW college-supported educational programs should be flexible.

- iv) The college-supported educational program should offer:
  - Flexibility and self-growth opportunities, and
  - Foster natural mentoring between alumni, experienced students, and newly entering students.

Programs need to allow for a wide variety of ages and experience, educational and work history backgrounds, family and financial situations, culture and personal desires.

- v) Institutional policies should:
  - Consider pre-assessment arrangements for students who may have experience in course content areas; include CHWs in identifying ways that these assessments can be undertaken.

Career path options should be enhanced and developed:

- vi) Institutions/Colleges can develop and expand employment opportunities within the community by:
  - Recommending employers seek/pay for better services provided by educated CHWs;
  - Establishing opportunities for shadowing experiences in different target health fields, so students develop early networking skills within the community; and
  - Creating opportunities through practicum experience for developing job seeking and technical skills, such as resume development, interviewing skills, and support in asking for promotions in the job.

## II. PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

### C. Curriculum Design

Curriculum design relates to the overall course structure (i.e., number of credits, elective courses, etc.) and course content that is utilized in a CHW educational program. Intimate knowledge of one's community is an essential part of being a CHW. It is essential that all individualized community educational methods and individualized classroom experience take into account the local community and cultural context, tailoring the curriculum to the community in order to enhance CHW knowledge and skills needed in the field.

### **3) Offering a diverse curriculum addressing learning styles for both community and classroom experience is essential as well as promoting core CHW competencies.**

- i) The Curriculum should address adult learning approaches; the curriculum should include a rich mix of methods and learning activities including:
  - group skills
  - individual skills
  - listening and oral tradition learning skills
  - writing and reading skills
  - on-line learning opportunities
  - processing field and life experience
- ii) Community health worker core competency classes should be mandatory.
- iii) Course elective opportunities are important. Institutions can offer/open up technical skills electives to CHW students.
  - Encourage/require students to enroll in existing college courses (i.e. communication electives) where classroom experience is helpful.
  - Develop opportunities for CHWs to take other classes at/from other institutions. For example: the CDC has helped to develop Public Health Courses at Dine' (Navajo) College.

### D. Instructional Approaches

Instructional approaches include the methods that are utilized in the capacity building/teaching process including assessment of competence for college credit, interactive classroom activities (role plays, etc) and fieldwork. College-supported educational programs must not lose focus when working with two keys groups—CHWs becoming students and students becoming CHWs. Experienced CHWs are the change agents of their communities. New students have the capacity to impact the delivery of health in their communities and to grow as CHWs. The knowledge of both groups and their experience in the educational system will impact their approach in their own community education efforts.

**4) Focus on effective instructional approaches that engage students becoming CHWs and CHWs becoming students.**

- i) Adult learning methods should be utilized for all students using highly interactive, participatory, and liberating approaches.
- ii) Help CHWs learn how one becomes an effective student in college. Faculty and staff should support CHWs in:
  - Navigation of the school
  - Learning the process of higher education
- iii) Help new CHW students focus on how one becomes an effective CHW in the community. Faculty should support students becoming CHWs through:
  - Orientation to the field and access to fieldwork
  - Exposure of CHW students to CHWs who have had the experience of navigating the community

**E. Recruitment and Retention**

Recruiting and retaining students refers to strategies utilized by a CHW educational program to ensure that students/CHWs enter and stay enrolled in a CHW educational program. Strong recruitment and retention must be carried out by CHW college-supported educational programs breaking down barriers and helping to develop appropriate and relevant systems that will support CHW efforts to further their learning.

**5) There are various barriers to address especially during the orientation process in order to assure student success.**

- i) Institutional objectives/guidelines should be developed to assess prior learning/experience in all students; in credit-bearing programs this should include offering credit for documented prior learning.
- ii) College-supported educational programs must introduce/adopt adaptable guidelines for college entrance and skills assessment requirements including:
  - Alternative admissions requirements (alternatives to GED, high school graduation requirements)
  - Strategies for addressing language barriers
  - Approaches to building reading and writing skills readiness
- iii) Mechanisms should be developed to address the fear of failure for all students (experienced/new CHWs) and the barriers that are the basis for this fear.
- iv) Institutional policies must help faculty and staff address possible early failure by allowing flexibility.

- v) Give students opportunities to learn and be assessed utilizing methods that are comfortable, while giving them the chance to explore other learning methods, such as writing papers and taking tests.
    - Introduce cultural awareness and sensitivity topics early by sharing personal experiences about CHW work experience and student experience.
    - Be careful how CHWs are defined; discuss issues of inclusion and exclusion so that all students and program faculty and staff feel confident that they understand the breadth and depth of who is included within the CHW field.
  - vi) Curriculum design and instructional approaches affect student outcomes.
    - Introductory courses give students a chance to experience “student life,” to decide whether or not the program is suitable for them, and to possibly help eliminate the fear of failing or of becoming a failure.
  - vii) Institutional flexibility equals sustainability concerning retention of students and might include:
    - Addressing the unique needs for family support such as affordable and even free daycare assistance for students who are taking courses and need study time;
    - Offering evening courses taken once or twice a week or weekend courses; and
    - Utilizing community teaching sites for courses.
- 6) Life and work experiences need to be honored... seek opportunities to give credit where credit is due.**
- i) Life experiences as well as on-the-job training should be evaluated to assess student needs for course work. Look at credit by assessment:
    - This must be culturally responsive and should offer a range of assessment strategies for credit.
    - Using a portfolio approach, documentation of competence should be included as an option for competency testing.
- 7) Career building incentives are varied and need to lead to other opportunities.** Develop a clear vision of what the desired outcomes are for having a college-supported CHW education:
- College-supported educational programs must assess future career opportunities at the beginning stages in planning the program.
  - Document opportunities available to CHWs with a college-supported education.
  - College-based educational programs must help build advancement opportunities for college-prepared CHWs in health and human service careers.
  - Evaluate if post-college course work leads to CHW promotions and increased compensation and enhanced benefits.
  - Network with employers to promote incentives (example: tuition reimbursement) for CHWs to obtain college-supported CHW education.
  - Assess with employers and CHWs if there are additional areas of curriculum focus needed to respond to the market.

### III. PROGRAM EVALUATION

#### F. Evaluation

Evaluation of the CHW educational program includes evaluating a wide range of variables including such areas as student outcomes in the classroom and workplace, curriculum content, staff and faculty development, field placements, and the institutional climate. Assessing the program's successes and challenges is a key obligation of those coordinating CHW college-supported education programs.

- 8. Evaluation processes are important to establishing and refining program success; they must be multi-level and on-going using a variety of assessment tools—using classroom assessments/tests/measures, workplace assessments, satisfaction surveys, and the like.**

### IV. PROGRAM MAINTENANCE

#### G: Sustainability

It is important that every college-supported CHW program work on issues of sustainability. Sustainability efforts should be targeted to supporting and sustaining all aspects and phases of a CHW educational program, and it should include goals for sustaining all contributors to the program including students, staff and faculty, and field partners.

- 9. Sustainability efforts are needed and must address a wide range of levels including student and institutional needs in college-supported educational programs.**
- 10. Policy and advocacy are an integral part of developing and implementing successful CHW educational programs. Skills in these areas should be developed in faculty, staff, and students both to promote the educational program and the well being of the communities served by the CHWs.**

#### **Update at the close of the funded project:**

The Key Considerations reported here reflect the views of the CHW-NEC Advisory Council during the life of the CHW-NEC Project from 2004-2008. They are intended to provide guidance to individual institutions seeking to create CHW-responsive educational programming. When they were developed, they were the Council's best thinking regarding identified Promising Practices. While these Key Considerations remain highly relevant today, it should also be noted that this document is intended to be a "living" document. As such, it should be periodically reviewed and revised by CHWs, and others working to support them, in ensuring that CHW education and capacity building efforts are optimally geared to meeting the needs of CHWs in the workforce.