

Center for Occupational and Environmental Health

Hunter College

Staff Retreat Summary and Follow-up

September 3, 2002

A. Retreat Summary

A staff retreat for the COEH was held on July 2, 2002, in the Solarium Room of Hunter College at 68th Street. The agenda included an organization and mission statement visioning process, a planning session discussing concrete steps to achieve the mission, and a discussion of office management issues. A list of attendees is attached as an appendix to this summary.

The visioning session began with the following questions posed to the group: *What was the Center's original mission, does this still fit, how might/should it be changed? What currently enables us to achieve our mission/what inhibits us?* Dr. David Kotelchuck, COEH Director, gave a brief history behind the COEH, the original mission and some of the center's early activities. Retreat participants were then asked to write on five sheets of paper posted around the room with the following headings:

- 1) Problems/Issues - what are the problems and issues the COEH ought to be addressing?
- 2) Destinations/Goals – what are your long-term goals/visions/dreams for the COEH?
- 3) Assets/Strengths – what are the current assets in the COEH that enable us to address the problems and issues identified in #1?
- 4) Barriers/Needs – what are the barriers and needs of the COEH in order to more fully address the problems/issues raised in #1?
- 5) Strategies/Actions – what concrete steps might be taken, both short and long term, to address problems and/or fulfill needs?

Participants were given 20 minutes to go around the room and enter ideas. They were instructed to start with any topic, to brain-storm, talk to each other, and be as honest and creative as possible. After writing on the poster-sheets, the group came back together to discuss each topic and to identify any common threads or themes.

B. Problems/Issues

The following is a summary of the problems and issues that participants raised during the visioning session:

General Problems:

- The COEH ought to be addressing public health problems, including, but not limited to: cancer, diabetes, AIDS/HIV, smoking, asthma, indoor air quality, lead poisoning, and World Trade Center hazards.
- Cumulative hazardous exposures in communities is a serious problem.

- Health disparities, particularly by ethnicity and class, are a problem the COEH should address.
- Environmental injustices, including disproportionate environmental exposures for people of color and low-income populations, is a problem.
- Lack of support for community-based health promotion/outreach work.
- Lack of partnerships between CBOs.
- Lack of link between physical and mental health problems (especially in light of WTC)
- Indoor air quality in offices and classrooms.

COEH specific problems:

- There is a lack of coordination between the environmental, community and occupation health programs/work that the COEH current performs.
- There is no link between the action/outreach, research, and training work of the COEH.
- The COEH has no policy or research agenda, particularly one that involves the community to address health disparities.

C. Destinations/Goals/Visions

The following is a summary of the destinations, goals and visions offered by retreat participants:

- Eliminate health disparities.
- Build community capacity to eliminate health disparities.
- Link the COEH to academic programs at Hunter.
- To be well know throughout the college, city, and nation.
- Raise community awareness of health inequalities.
- Help communities and workers control impacts on their health.
- Create healthier living environments.
- Link urban planning and public health to address urban health issues.
- Improve access to health care.
- Publish and document our work more widely.
- Publish curricula, such as training manuals.
- Inform policy-makers about key public health issues.
- Have a clear policy agenda.

D. Assets/Strengths

The following is a list of the assets and strengths of the COEH that retreat participants noted:

- The COEH is fiscally strong.
- COEH staff is experienced (and awesome) trainers and facilitators.
- The COEH is a trusted partner for city and state government.

- The COEH is well respected by community groups.
- The COEH is adaptable and resilient.
- Staff members share resources, work well together, respect one another, and collaborate as a team often.
- The COEH staff has passion for their work (“brains and heart”).
- The COEH management is open-minded.
- The staff has valuable life experience that they combine with other forms of expertise.
- There is cultural and language diversity in the organization.
- The COEH has great interns.

E. Barriers/Needs

The following is a list of barriers and needs that the COEH faces.

- More staff get-togethers and bonding opportunities.
- Need to be more “vision-driven” rather than money-driven.
- Need to publicize center to students at Hunter and beyond.
- Money, money and more money..adequate long-term funding.
- Staff raises.
- Lack of communication among staff projects/programs.
- Computer link from office to home.
- Long-term commitment to staff to ensure job security.
- No research opportunities to quantify various problems we work on.
- Too little faculty participation in the COEH’s work/projects.
- More and better integration of the center’s different projects.
- Adequate office equipment for all staff.

F. Strategies and Actions

The following is a summary of the strategies and actions proposed by retreat participants.

- Create an environmental and occupational health research/resource center/library at the COEH.
- Link the center’s work to a class or number of classes in the urban public health program.
- Conduct educational outreach to community groups and work in collaboration with CBOs in these efforts.
- Develop new training skills in popular education methods.
- More and better publicity in making the COEH known.
- Additional training, when requested, for COEH employees.
- Write a research paper about CHWs.
- Produce center brochure.
- Update web-site and make it more useful for COEH staff.
- Develop a “community-toolbox” for health promotion.

- Identify and highlight the unique/strategic “niche” that the COEH brings to the fields of environmental and occupational health.
- Publicize the COEH at Hunter College “fair.”
- Conduct environmental health research in communities most heavily burdened in NYC.

G. Mission Statement

A new draft mission statement for the COEH was proposed, but no agreement was reached whether the following statement should replace the current mission statement:

The Center for Occupational & Environmental Health at Hunter College aims to improve and enhance the health of communities and workers, particularly those currently underserved by the health-care system, by eliminating health disparities based on class, race, and gender through collaborative research, training and outreach partnerships.

H. Summary and Updates

The topics raised by retreat participants were summarized into the attached table labeled “retreat update.”

**COEH Retreat Update
September 3, 2002**

	Vision	Need	Action(s) Taken	Date of Action	Staff Contact	Further Needs
1a	<i>Develop niche</i>	Visioning session				
2a	<i>Stable funding</i>	<i>Long-term funding (3+ years)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health force retraining grant (NY State DOH) ATSDR, Air Toxics and Asthma grant (NIOSH) 		Jason, Elena, Sergio	
2b		Short-term cash	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stony-Wald Fund NYCHA training Mt. Sinai Urban Anglers Raised approx. \$90,000!	July/Aug 2002	Jason, Elena, Sergio	
		Short-term cash	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NYCDOH health/safety training Private sector worker training 	July/Aug 2002	Andrew	
		Fix HRA contract	Extension and modification from HRA	July/Aug 2002	Jason, Elena, Sergio	
	<i>Policy & Research Agenda</i>	Research topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Urban planning public health research G/W health & exposure mapping project CHWs research agenda 		Jason, all staff	
2c		CHW research topics			Elena, Sergio, Rita, Romy	
2d		Policy agenda/ working paper				
3a	<i>Empowering communities and workers</i>	WTC outreach & education			Dave	
3b			NYCHA asthma training	Aug 2002	Elena, Sergio	
3c			NYCDOH health & safety training	July/Aug 2002	Andrew	
3d		Training/curriculum	Develop popular education training/theory building		Elena	
3f		Develop OH&S training for private sector			Andrew	
4a	<i>Eliminate health disparities/EJ</i>	Research agenda	See research topics above		Jason, Candice, all staff	
4b			Urban anglers study with Mt. Sinai	Aug 2002	Jason, Sergio, Elena	
5a	<i>Academic link</i>		Meetings with faculty	July/Aug 2002	Jason	
5b			Develop/sponsor joint seminar lunch series, possibly around CHWs		Jason, Elena, Sergio	
5c			Library/resource center	July 2002	Jason, all staff	
6a	<i>Intra-organization</i>	Meetings, social events				

	Vision	Need	Action(s) Taken	Date of Action	Staff Contact	Further Needs
	<i>communication</i>					
6b		Intra-office network	Develop LAN for computer connection		Jason	
7a	<i>Publicize COEH</i>	Improve/update Web page	New web site	July 2002	Jeremy	Better links to CHWs; post publications & training materials on-line
7b		Attend fair/hold open-house				
7c		Attend classes in beginning of semester				
7d		Documentary of CHWs	Hired video editor to edit conference video. Contacting others for CHWs filming.	August 2002		
7e		Publicity	Banners; bulletin boards	August 2002		
7f			New business cards and letter head	August 2002		
8a	<i>Improve office infrastructure</i>		New conference room furniture	July 2002		
8b			Air conditioners	July 2002		
8c			CUNY technology grant for new computers	July 2002	Jason	
8d			Office supply/equipment inventory	Aug 2002	Jeremy	
8e		Reduce paper use & copies	Use copy center; all dbl sided; email msgs			
8f		Computer problem specialist	Updated virus software, email program, and operating systems. Get everyone access to server drive to back-up files.	Aug 2002		
8g			Key, equipment and conference room sign-out form.			
8h			Lunch room clean-up day – THURSDAY	Aug 2002		
9a	<i>Enhance staff</i>	Staff training/exposures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rita/Romy conference • All project staff funded to APHA • Candice GIS training 	July/Aug 2002		
9b		Interns	Arkeyris – project & admin staff Doug – G/W research/GIS			
9c		Fundraiser/ grant writer				
9d		CHWs				
9e		Industrial hygienist/ trainer				
9f		Epidemiologist				
9g		CHAMP – field supervisor				