

## **THE CCHERS/AMERICORPS EXPERIENCE: THE KEY TO SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS**

### **Story Session ~ Partnership Assessment & Improvement**

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This session addressed changes in key leadership positions, how these changes impacted the partnership, and how the partnership was renewed. CCHERS/AmeriCorps places members in five community host sites doing health care related service. Several factors converged to weaken a long-term partnership with one community host site. Developing and maintaining clear communication through a period of change was a tremendous challenge but ultimately successful in creating an open, trusting and productive partnership. Values and goals were reviewed and agreed upon anew, strengths and assets were reevaluated in the process of building a relationship with new site staff, and members' experiences were improved upon. Participants discussed the importance of continuous partnership assessment and improvement to maintain the integrity of partnership and examined the process of addressing needed changes in a mutually beneficial way.

CCHERS, Inc. was created in 1991 and was incorporated as an independent 501 (c) (3) not-for-profit organization associated with a large university in 1997. The organization's mission is to educate health professions students for careers in primary care in community based settings through "academic community health centers" that integrate education, research, and service to influence and change health professions education, improve health care delivery, and promote health systems change

The presenters discussed the potential challenges partnerships may face by using their own organization as an example. After the CCHERS/AmeriCorps Program Coordinator retired, a CCHERS staff person temporarily took over for the position for 5 months. There were also staff changes in two partner sites. After these staff changes, members' experiences at sites were unsatisfactory, there was insufficient rapport with the partner site supervisor, partners did not have an understanding of the partnership or of each other's goals, and did not capitalize well on each other's strengths.

The importance of recognizing the dynamics of and approaches to changing relationships with partners following changes in staffing was stressed during the presentation. Solutions offered to maintain partnerships after such changes included identifying and implementing reassessment necessary following internal organizational changes, developing and maintaining clear communications, reviewing and agreeing on partnership goals, recognizing each others' strengths, and implementing an ongoing negotiation of understandings, all with the goal of improving members' experiences