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DESIGN YOUR TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PLAN

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The wide selection of conferences, workshops, and distance learning opportunities available at this juncture presents supervisors with the challenge of selecting the most appropriate learning methods to increase staff expertise and competencies, while simultaneously being sensitive to position responsibilities and restricted resources. Often times, training opportunities are selected without initially determining how the training fits into the “big picture” of overall learning and skill set development. The ever-changing public health and nonprofit industry fosters the expectation and the need for personnel of community based organizations (CBOs) to constantly transform themselves and their organizations. Modifications to a CBO’s strategy for expansion and programming can result in improved personnel performance expectations and increased capabilities. A supervisor can assist an employee in designing a structured training and development plan that addresses identified learning gaps or needs with specific and measurable outcomes. A training and development plan can be created with a focus on several types of learning gaps or needs. The most common include the following: 1) performance gaps – learning needed to meet specific performance standards, 2) growth gaps – learning needed to achieve specific professional goals; and, 3) opportunity gaps – learning needed to qualify for an identified new job or position promotion. The training and development plan should be used as a general guide to accomplish specific goals. “The real treasure found from implementing your plan is the learning you achieve. Look at learning as a process and you enjoy the long time during the journey rather than the short time at the destination.” (McNamara, 2006).

Whether a formal or informal training and development plan is being considered, charting out a plan with specific components will provide the individual with a sense of direction and purpose. Information from varied sources can be used to assist in the creation of the training and development plan. Supervisors can provide essential feedback that will help a staff person create training and development goals. It may also be worthwhile for the staff person to ask their peers for training and development suggestions. A useful tool that can help in the creation of the plan is the most recent performance appraisal of the individual. The performance appraisal may already detail areas of knowledge and skills that the individual must learn or improve upon to meet current performance standards. This also serves to provide ongoing tracking and discussion to ensure that the training and development outcomes are applicable to the current position. Current job descriptions can also identify specific competencies that can be converted to learning objectives within the training and development plan.

Below is a list of questions to consider when designing a training and development plan:

- 1) Should a self-assessment be conducted?
- 2) Is the individual creating a training and development plan in order to address a performance gap, growth gap, or opportunity gap?
- 3) Is there a list of competencies, job descriptions, or job analysis available to help the individual identify training and development goals?
- 4) What are the best learning activities (trainings, conferences, distance learning opportunities) available to the individual to achieve their learning goals?

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- 5) How much money will it cost to fund the plan?
- 6) Are there any timelines that should be considered in the plan?
- 7) How will the individual verify that each of the learning objectives were accomplished?

The training and development plan should consist of the following components.

- Training goals: overall results or capabilities the individual hopes to attain by implementing the plan;
- Learning objectives: what the individual will be able to do as a result of the learning activities in the plan;
- Learning methods/activities: what the individual will do in order to achieve the learning objectives;
- Documentation/evidence of learning: evidence produced during the individual's learning activities; and,
- Evaluation: assessment on quality of evidence in order to conclude whether the individual achieved the learning objectives.

Most importantly, the plan should be kept simple with two to four goals to get started. Each goal should be associated with a learning objective that, when accomplished, will result in the staff member/learner reaching the overall training goal. Ongoing reflection and discussions between supervisor and staff member regarding the individual's training and development progress is vital during this learning process. Reflection can also serve to enhance the developmental process and/or refocus the direction of the plan.

McNamara, C. (2006). *Complete Guidelines to Design Your Training Plan*, retrieved December 18, 2006 from www.managementhelp.org