A University-Community Collaborative Project to Teach Adults about Genetic Risks and Environmental Exposures

Center for Environmental Genetics (ES 06096), University of Cincinnati
and
Greater Cincinnati Occupational Health Center

GCOHC Mission

"To protect workers and their communities"

GCOHC Contributions

• Extensive knowledge of needs/concerns of workers & community groups
• Experience advocating for workers’ rights & safe working conditions
• Experience communicating with workers & community groups
• Trainers experienced with industry, organized labor & minority populations
• Trainers respected by workers & community groups

COEP Mission

"To promote the translation of science-based research for use by the general public and public health agencies"

COEP Contributions

• Commitment to community education
• Access to scientific expertise
• Involvement of faculty, students & staff
• Access to financial & technical resources
• Expertise in grantsmanship & knowledge of funding sources

Challenges of the Collaboration

• Full inclusion of both parties in decision-making
• Mutual respect for different professional styles & expertise
• Sensitivity to the language & experiences of diverse groups
• Balancing the competing needs for scientific accuracy & public understanding
• Sustaining the participation of individuals & organizations
• Recognizing & adjusting for competing agendas

Strengths & Accomplishments of the Collaboration

• Effective translation of technical terms to simple concepts
• Improved understanding of the social impacts of scientific research
• Involvement of diverse & historically underserved populations
• Opportunities for new learning experiences for university students
• Access to new concepts & information
• Increased awareness of personal risks from environmental exposures
• Valuable experience for faculty, students & staff
• Increased visibility & credibility of GCOHC & COEP/CEG
• New & stronger connections with other organizations
• New insights gained about the public’s interests/concerns about gene-environment interactions
• Receipt of NIEHS grant: “Partnerships to Address Ethical Challenges in Environmental Health” (RFA: ES-02-005)

Method

LEGENDS developed a manual for use by instructors which includes presentations on genetics, environmental health and gene/environment interactions. The curriculum has been presented to over 1000 people to date, in workshops and discussion sessions.

Purpose

To educate workers, professional organizations, teachers and community residents on the fundamental concepts of environmental diseases and human genetics and to promote discussions about their ethical, legal and social implications.

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Approaches to the Challenges

• Identify shared values & common goals
• Formalize roles & responsibilities
• Develop program evaluation measures based on common goals
• Routinely assess the collaboration & address needed changes
• Determine the need for/value of an advisory committee
• Determine how grant monies are allocated equitably
• Identify/address potential conflicts of interest & competing agendas