Partnerships/Community

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Integrating Community into Training

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*In *TrainingBriefs*, Mosaica uses the term *member* to refer to individuals (including members, volunteers, and participants) providing service in National Service programs.

National Service program staff, site supervisors, and trainers share responsibility for member training and development. *TrainingBriefs* provide these individuals with useful information and innovative ideas for training and development.

Community involvement and partnership are key to the success of National Service programs. The best way to show members* — and the community — the importance of working with the community is to incorporate the community into every aspect of your program, including your training — from pre-service training and continuing through in-service and close-of-service activities.

Members are adult learners (see *Starting Strong*, pp. 193–196) who need training that is practical, realistic, and relates to their service in the community; members also need opportunities to learn about and to build trust with the community.

Incorporating the community in your training improves training effectiveness and enriches your program's relationship with the community. Members will see the natural link between training sessions and practical applications in their community sites, feel strongly invested in the communities they serve, and genuinely appreciate the value and assets inherent in the community.

Show members your respect for the community in one easy way: demonstrate it! Read on for some reminders on how to integrate community into training.

Invite guest trainers from the community. Always look first to local experts — agency staff, community volunteers, community residents, etc. — who have relevant knowledge and experience to provide skills training for your members. For example, ask a public official or local leader to take the lead on topics such as where the community can

access services or local demographics. (For information on finding effective guest trainers, see *TrainingBriefs* #7 and #8.)

Involve community resource people. Beyond your program's training sessions, identify local residents (i.e., people within the community) and community service providers (i.e., people who serve the community) to serve as resources for additional skill-development opportunities that expand on topics of interest to members. For each training topic provide a list of local experts to serve as "resource people." Consider a variety of individuals with specific experience and skills and ensure that they are willing and able to serve this role. Ask local leaders and resource persons to assume visible roles (e.g., keynote speaker, graduation guest, brown bag lunch participant) at your kick-off ceremony, in-service training, and continuation-of-service events. Throughout the year, they can serve as resource people and role models for members for both possible careers and continued community service.

Incorporate the community into training activities. Throughout the year, use community-based examples in your training sessions. While including these examples makes sense for some content-specific skills training topics (e.g., teen mentoring, public safety skills), also consider community-based examples for general skills topics (e.g., group problem solving, professionalism). For example, with the topic of conflict resolution, create a role-play scenario that builds conflict resolution skills based on a situation that

may arise in working with community residents or community-based staff (e.g., a local resident upset when a member organizes a community meeting without including neighborhood leaders). For a session on cross-cultural communication, develop a case study that addresses cross-cultural communication skills needs related to community-focused issues (e.g., an adolescent's immigrant parent who is ashamed to have her child receive assistance from tutors of a different ethnicity). Whatever the training, use realistic examples that members are likely to experience in their service with community residents and community-based staff. Invite community members to observe, evaluate, and provide feedback on both the community-based example and the skill-building training topic.

Move training into the community. Design training opportunities in which members interact with community residents and resource people. When training on community needs, go beyond traditional lectures and activities by having members undertake an interactive community assessment. For example, for a session on teen pregnancy issues, have cooperative learning teams interview community members (e.g., teen parents, clinic staff person, prevention specialist, etc.). Encourage members to visit community neighborhoods and sites for the interviews. Then, facilitate a session where members report back about what they learned. Also, look beyond your routine meeting space by reserving a room or lounge in the service area. Rotate training to different community agencies and sites to acquaint members with different environments within the community.

Train members to be effective with the community. Offer members training sessions to develop both general skills needed to interact effectively with community members (e.g., cultural competence, interpersonal communication, listening comprehension), and specific skills needed for successfully planning and implementing community service activities (e.g., establishing a parent tutoring project in an elementary school, identifying steps in carrying out a home visit). During the year, build in regular opportunities for members to discuss their community involvement activities, share ideas, and identify additional knowledge and skills needs. To effectively meet member training needs, check in regularly with members using reflection activities.

Integrating the community into various aspects of training demonstrates your program's respect for the many assets of community residents, resource people, and community-based organizations. By integrating the community in your training, you can help members gain important knowledge and skills, develop genuine connections with people within the community, and most important, make a big difference in the lives of those they serve.

Special thanks to participants of Mosaica's training seminar in Columbia, South Carolina, May 1998, whose ideas and discussions formed the basis for this *TrainingBrief.*

ACTIVITY: The Community Insider/Outsider

Purposes:
To assess member perceptions about the benefits and challenges of members who are both community insiders and outsiders. To develop a list of realistic action goals to deal with insider/outsider issues as a basis for developing an effective community partnership.

Instructions:
Have members think individually for 2-3 minutes and write down both potential benefits and challenges of members who are community "outsiders" — people who come from outside the service population or area — in developing partnerships with communities.

On a newsprint sheet, write "Outsiders" at the top and draw a vertical line that splits the sheet into "Benefits" and "Challenges." Lead a large group brainstorm that allows participants to share their ideas about outsider benefits. Write down their ideas on the newsprint sheet in the "Benefits" column. Complete the same process for outsider challenges.

Once again, have members think individually about benefits and challenges in developing partnerships with communities, but this time for "insiders" — people who come from within the service community. Complete the same large group brainstorming process as described above.

Facilitate a large group discussion around member perceptions of what benefits and challenges insiders and outsiders bring. Have members think about how their perceptions relate to their roles in interacting with people from the community. Develop an action plan — with delegated responsibilities, clear timelines, and an evaluation method — to maximize benefits and address challenges of both member outsiders and insiders.

Variation:
With 16 or more participants, consider dividing members into small groups (4-6 persons) that each brainstorm issues and set action goals in one category among the following: outsider benefits, outsider challenges, insider benefits, and insider challenges. Use cooperative learning roles — facilitator, recorder, reporter, timekeeper, and observer — and have each group's reporter share their ideas and goals with the large group (For information on cooperative learning roles, see *Starting Strong*, pp.197-202).