

PAHO's Human Resources

(Prepared by the United States of America)

Introduction

The Working Group on PAHO in the 21st Century identified “Resources for Health” as a significant issue for consideration. This topic was subsequently split into PAHO’s resources and resources “in-country” available to member states and further subdivided into financial and human resources. The Working Group tasked the PAHO Secretariat with the development of the section on “in-country” human and financial resources. The section on PAHO’s financial resources would be developed by the “Consultative Group on Regional Budget Policy” under the direction of Dr. Karen Sealy, with input from members of the 21st Century Working Group. The remaining section on PAHO’s human resources was tasked to the United States for development. This piece may overlap with issues identified under “Modalities for Technical Cooperation in Health.”

Training of PAHO Staff

The Working Group clearly delineated the need to increase capacity building in the countries and subregions. While this may appear to speak only to the issue of human resources in-country, PAHO personnel can play a critical role. Specifically, if effective capacity building is to occur in-country, then the PAHO personnel assigned must have significant training and expertise in sustainable capacity building. The PAHO Biennial Program Budget (BPB) for 2004-2005 proposes 1.85 million dollars for staff development. However, the description does not contain a category for specific staff training on particular priority areas. The breakdown of the allocation of these funds would be helpful for countries to review. Furthermore, it would be useful if priority areas delineated for staff training within the BPB should fall directly in line with priorities identified by Member Countries. Whereas it might be less efficient and financially difficult for every country office to have an expert on capacity building, PAHO headquarters could compile a small team of experts in this field that could be dispatched on an as-needed basis to countries or subregions to help in capacity building efforts.

The issue of training and appropriate expertise of PAHO personnel extends beyond capacity building. Countries have expressed concern that the staff sometimes assigned to the PAHO country office is unqualified or insufficiently trained to handle the issues that arise in that particular country. In some cases, the individual has basic training or knowledge in the area, but lacks specialized skills. In this situation, short course-work or training might be sufficient to help that person perform in his/her job. However, in other instances, individuals have been hired for positions for which they are unqualified. Perhaps this could be addressed if member countries were given a greater role in determining the requirements for a given position in the PAHO Office in their country.

There are emerging issues within the region, which do not fall into PAHO’s historical personnel composition, but which are emanating from the Director’s new vision. This would include social communication experts, information management experts, and

program managers, among others. PAHO should develop a strategy to identify who can fill these personnel gaps. Other PAHO technical experts may also need training in some of these areas.

Hiring of PAHO Staff

Another suggestion would be to identify a list of core competencies that are necessary in each of the PAHO country offices. Then, additional analysis would be required to determine the other core-competencies and skill sets required of staff working in a particular country. Central to this concept, however, is ensuring that PAHO headquarters is geared to provide that set of workforce skills to personnel assigned to the field. This would best address the Working Group's concern that a "one-model fits all" approach to country offices is not working effectively.

The Working Group also expressed concern about the process of hiring and retaining consultants. The group noted there seems to be little oversight for determining whether the consultants being hired are needed given the overall strategic areas of work identified by member states. Furthermore, the group suggested that there seems to be lax policy for determining the qualifications for consultants. One solution might be to develop a more stringent policy for the hiring and evaluation of short-to-mid-term consultants. However, direct country participation in this practice would probably be too burdensome both for member countries and PAHO.

PAHO currently encourages women to apply for careers within the organization. However, there is little activity to actively recruit and retain women in senior positions. Rising through the ranks at PAHO frequently implies a move from country to country or subregion to headquarters. For women, this generally implies a significant challenge due to family obligations.

The aging of the PAHO workforce also will pose a significant issue for the organization in the coming years. With retirement age of 62, there are a number of expert PAHO staff persons who will be retiring soon. This will present a number of gaps in the organization that PAHO will have to fill. It is not uncommon to see an individual retire from PAHO one day and then be re-hired as a consultant the next. That position may then go unfilled or revised.

Career Development

Junior staff do not always have opportunities to move up or grow within the organization. These individuals are building a wealth of organizational and technical expertise that could be capitalized on if training paths are created for qualified individuals to continue their career development. This would help to improve morale among staff.