

Promising Practice: Use of Cohorts
CareerAdvance®
Community Action Project of Tulsa County

The Community Action Project of Tulsa County uses cohorts for training under its CareerAdvance program. The CareerAdvance project has been a collaboration involving many partners, including Tulsa Community College, Workforce Tulsa, Family and Children's Services, Union Public Schools, Community Education Program, Tulsa Technology Center, and the Northeast Oklahoma Area Health Education Center (AHEC).

The use of cohorts is important because the interpersonal relationships that peers develop in the cohort make a critical difference to their academic learning, emotional and psychological well-being, and ability to broaden perspectives. Cohorts provide active, interactive, and dynamic settings for students to grow their knowledge and skills. They also build community, foster creativity, build leadership skills, and encourage greater progress. Students are likely to experience mutual care and shared purpose in the program. Administrative motivators or benefits are reducing attrition rates and increase in completion and graduation rates. Thus, cohort model members are more successful as they make their way through their individual program, and graduates are more successful once they begin to practice their craft.

Cohort models, whether intentionally or otherwise, come with logistic and administrative ease. That is, it is easier to schedule and track members as a group. In addition, members have more clarity in the knowledge of courses and timeframes, especially in closed models where there is no room for course choice.

The cohort approach is used to identify a group of participants who are all following the same set of occupational training. The cohort begins training with a course referred to as "CORE". It is a four week course that covers basic computer literacy, study skills, conflict resolution, writing, time and stress management, as well as soft skill work-behavior issues. The CORE class is important because it prepare participants for entrance exams, helps them learn college readiness skills, and sets the stage for higher completion rates. Along with regular occupational training, this cohort group meets outside the classroom throughout their time in training. These structured meetings are called Partner Meetings. Partner Meetings occur weekly during the first semester of training, twice monthly during the second semester, and monthly after the first year of training. Cohorts, both formal and informal, are effective because they foster collegiality. The cohort supports participant retention among students who share a common thread of experiences.

Other Health Professions Opportunity Grant (HPOG) Programs can adopt the cohort model for their participants as they move up the career ladder in nursing. They can set up similar classes for a cohort and track them as they move from Certified Nurse Assistant (CNA) to Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) and Registered Nurse (RN). Providing tutoring and group study for the cohort as supplements to their regular classes can build more group support.