

Optimizing the staffing model for resilient Cores

Other

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Junior flow cytometry Core staff are either exceptional at instrumentation or Lab-practices, rarely is in-depth training in both lab-practices and instrumentation components accessible. During the pandemic we have piloted staffing approaches via collaboration between two UCSF flow cytometry campus Cores. We aimed to help junior staff feel respected, foster empowerment and enhance career development. Two training models were tested; 1. Core staff cross-training in instrumentation involving staff from different Cores; 2. Staff sharing model between Campus Cores from the same field but different expertise, one in Instrumentation and the other in lab-practices.

Through advanced task-planning and regular check-ins both models exceed expectations. Using model (1) we were able to easily pivot staff responsibilities during the pandemic when staffing was limited. The benefits of this model provided short-term solutions for staff shortages or busy periods. Cores can cross-train staff ahead of time, staff have increased exposure to different lab environments and technical applications. A downside is that limited exposure to the different lab environments can create challenges in communication and building partnerships. Model (2) provided a long-term solution and is beneficial when flexible working schedules are considered. The caveat is that the staff member must co-exists in 2 different lab environments, therefore a specific candidate who is adaptable, motivated, and has great communications skills must be selected.

The aim of both models offers junior staff the opportunity to up-skill and progress within a Core career track. While there is value for both models separately, concurrent implementation provided the most benefit. As many Core laboratories experience staffing issues, considering an all-encompassing training approach via connecting with partner Cores offers potential and resiliency for the challenges faced. Such approaches offer opportunities for motivated team-members to up-skill, allowing for career development and staff retention in the Core Laboratory environment.