

fact sheets **BEST PRACTICES** fact sheets

This Fact Sheet provides a brief overview of a small sample of the wealth of information found in Best Practices for Hunting and Shooting Recruitment and Retention. See back for details.

BUILDING YOUR PROGRAM ON SOLID GROUND

Why Use Best Practices to Help Build Your Program?

Using best practices to guide the design, development, and delivery of your programs can mean more effective use of your time and money and greater long-term results. Research conducted over the last decade provides a foundation for a successful program that has long-term impact; not just “feel-good” numbers for board reports and newspaper articles. The best practices that incorporate this research are listed below. See the For More Information section on the back for details on how you can learn more about each one.

NOTE: All the best practices for building your program are based on the assumption that you have already successfully planned your program (goals, objectives, etc.). There is a separate set of best practices to guide the planning process, and if you haven’t already done so, you should consult these before doing anything else.

Select Delivery Systems

Before you obtain or develop program materials, select the delivery system. Where will you deliver the program (your own building, a school, a city park, a community center)? Who will deliver it (your educational staff, volunteers, teachers)?

Don’t try to do everything alone. Evaluate potential partners and select those that will be most beneficial. Involve key partners in planning the program materials and implementation strategies. When working with partners, consider:

- How can you make the programs relevant to those delivering it?
- How can you align your curricula with national and state standards (where appropriate)?
- How can you provide on-going, professional development/training to those implementing the program?

Develop Tools and Delivery Approaches

After you identify delivery systems, select the tools you will need for the program. Don’t reinvent the wheel. Identify and review existing materials to see if they meet your goals and objectives. Many existing programs can be modified easily by adding state/local information and/or adding lessons. Start from scratch only if you are certain there is no program available that meets your needs.

There are many best practices that should be applied to both the development of tools and how the materials are delivered. For example, when developing tools, you need to consider the age, development level, and background of your participants. However, instructors also need to understand how to teach different age groups, development levels, and backgrounds.

The best practices presented here are not stand-alone principles. They overlap, and each one relies on the others to be truly effective.

Make sure that your tools and delivery approaches:

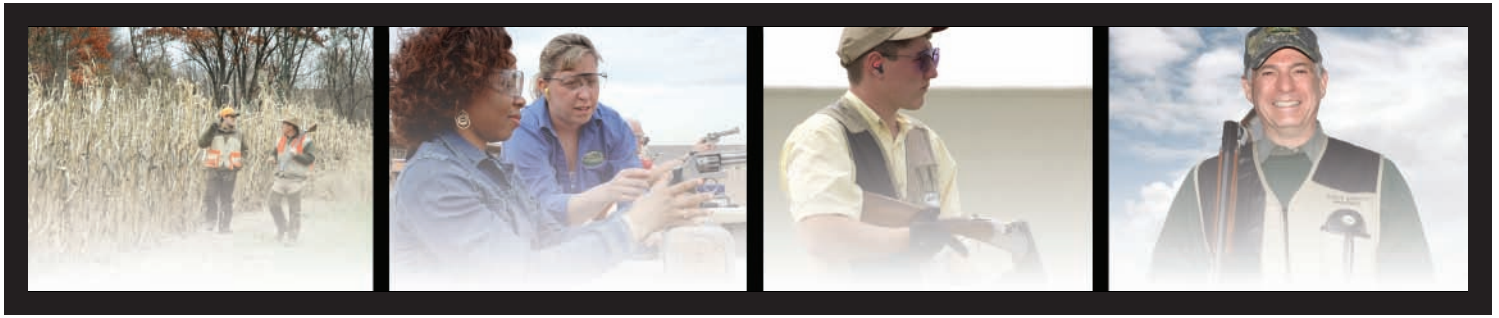
- Consider delivery systems and involve stakeholders during program development.
- Are relevant to the mission of the sponsors and the objectives of the audience.
- Align curricula with national and state standards when appropriate.
- Recognize the critical role of ongoing professional development.
- Support, engage in, and make use of scientific, social, educational, and other appropriate research.
- Examine existing materials and resources before developing new ones.
- Clearly address safety and other regulations, and reduce real risks to everyone involved.

- Are experiential.
- Empower learners.
- Are learner-centered to provide collaborative learning opportunities and development of critical thinking skills.
- Use multiple teaching methods to accommodate diverse learning styles.
- Consider the social context in which the education takes place and provide avenues to enhance the social support for learners.
- Identify and target one or more outcomes or skills, beyond the subject matter, that are broadly useful to the participant.

FOR MORE INFORMATION...

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CREATING OPPORTUNITIES AND ACCESS

Every successful company is constantly looking for opportunities to create new customers or to provide new services and products to existing customers. In the past, the shooting and wildlife recreation community had either stable or growing participation without having to compete for new participants. However, those days are history.

Research indicates there is significant interest within the general public to try hunting and the shooting sports, and having a place to go is critical for people to participate in these activities. Also, surveys have consistently shown that not having a reasonably convenient place to hunt or shoot is one of the top reasons why people drop out.

The Best Practices Workbook has two chapters on creating opportunities and access for hunting and shooting. Some of the highlights from these chapters include:

Build it and They Will Come

The first Best Practice is the most obvious: Wherever possible, provide access to safe, accessible shooting ranges or hunting opportunities—preferably close to population centers. Many people have an interest in hunting and shooting, and if the opportunities are there, they will come. For hunting opportunities, be sure that the areas are well managed. Few things are more important to hunters than seeing game. Surveys suggest that seeing plentiful game is even more important than bagging game to many hunters.

Welcoming and Friendly

Make the experience user-friendly. Provide adequate parking and restrooms where possible. Put signs along well-traveled roads near the facility. Implement guidelines for making your facility a good neighbor to the local community. For shooting ranges in particular, first impressions are critical. Who is the first person a new participant will meet when they come to your facility? Will this person be

friendly and helpful, or act gruff and bothered by the interruption? The goal of R&R events is to attract new people. Anything that detracts from that goal should be identified and eliminated.

Get the Word Out

Many times, hunting and shooting opportunities exist close to population centers, but nobody knows about them. Look for ways to let people know about your facility. Lapses or lags in providing information on what additional opportunities exist may result in a person losing interest. Web sites addresses and handouts containing next-step information, such as www.wheretoshoot.org and www.rangeinfo.org are excellent resources.

Provide Alternatives

Introduced properly, shooting practically sells itself. New shooters want to shoot. If you can't provide a "real shooting" activity for a new participant, then provide a simulated experience. The important thing is to get them shooting as much and as often as possible. There are several options, including archery, air guns, and electronic simulators. Regardless of what type of alternative shooting experience you provide, be sure to capture contact information from all participants so you can provide follow-up information on other events and opportunities that can help move them closer to becoming lifelong shooters.

Easy and Fun

People become interested in shooting and hunting because it looks like something they can successfully do, and it looks interesting and fun. Make sure their experience meets these criteria. Offer experiences that provide high initial success. Save the more challenging stuff for later.

Teach them How

Very few people are "naturals" when they try something the first time, yet having initial success is

critical to make new recruits want to come back for more. Have knowledgeable staff or volunteers on hand to provide instruction/training for those who want/need it. Notice and praise any and all improvements.

Make it Inexpensive

In general, the lower the costs of participation, the greater number of new participants you can expect. This is especially true for people who have become aware of shooting as an activity they might be interested in, and are prepared to “try it on for size.” This is a critical time. If the costs of experimenting with the activity are too high, they may abandon the interest before they ever really find out if they like it or not. Keeping costs low for new participants will also allow for multiple trials, which is critical for advancing to the next step.

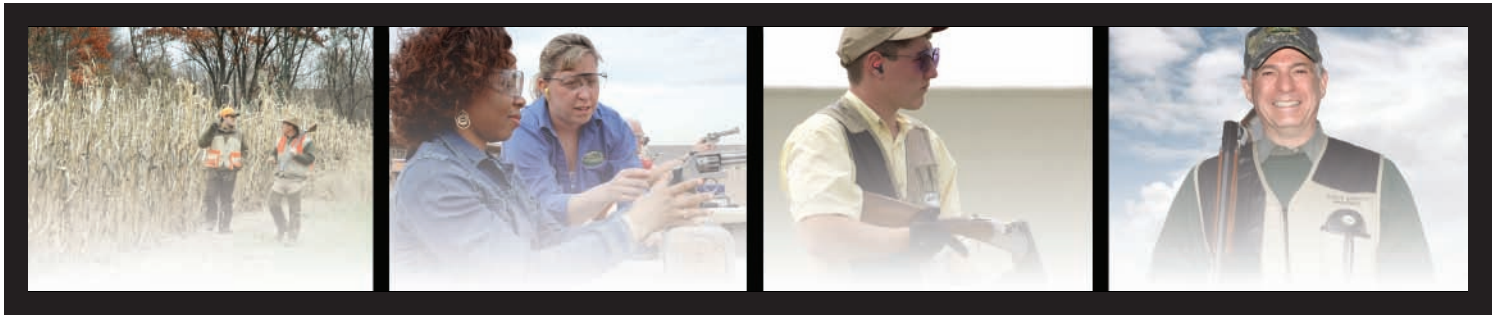
Find Private Partners

Effective partnerships are critical for the hunting and shooting sports community to have any meaningful impact on recruitment and retention issues. A natural partnership exists among agencies, conservation organizations, local retailers and private shooting ranges. Create and/or enhance these partnerships wherever possible. The Workbook contains tips and suggestions for doing this.

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DIVERSE AUDIENCES AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Substantial segments of the population encounter barriers and constraints to participation in hunting and shooting because they are “nontraditional audiences.” There is an entire chapter in the Workbook on breaking down barriers for diverse audiences, and another for people with disabilities.

Diversity is good

Diverse participants add value to any program—they strengthen individual members, the community, and the sponsoring organization. Currently, white males are the dominant participants in hunting and shooting. Compared to the majority of the population, racial and ethnic minority groups are less likely to participate in many forms of natural resource-based recreation activities. However, racial and ethnic minority populations—particularly Hispanic populations—will dramatically increase their share of the U.S. population over the next several decades, and the number of women exceeded the number of men in this country as of July 2001. Women, people with disabilities, and racial and ethnic minority groups offer tremendous potential for increasing the number of people who hunt and shoot.

This does not mean that women and racial and ethnic minorities should be targeted more than white males, necessarily. There may be times and situations where quite the opposite is true, depending on your program goals and objectives. But when your objectives call for outreach to diverse audiences, this section of the Workbook can help.

Effective programs for reaching diverse audiences:

- Involve the minority population being addressed in all aspects of planning.
- Lessen or remove barriers that constrain access.
- Reflect the culture of those being served.
- Develop a network of social support.

- Reduce boundaries that can occur when members of two or more cultures meet.
- Make members of minority groups feel welcome.
- Provide positive role models.
- Ensure the materials are instructionally sound.
- Use evaluation to determine whether their objectives are being achieved.

Each of these Best Practices is covered in detail in the Workbook.

Break down barriers

Approximately one out of every five Americans has a significant disability. Persons with disabilities are found in every socioeconomic group, age group, ethnic group, and religious group. People with disabilities have long been hindered from participating in outdoor recreation activities like hunting and shooting because of structural and social barriers. As a result of changing attitudes, legislation, technological developments, and education, significant progress has been made within the past decade to include people with disabilities in outdoor recreation programs and improve access to related facilities and lands.

Effective programs for reaching people with disabilities:

- Include persons with disabilities and individuals who work with them in the design and implementation of the program.
- Are inclusive.
- See people with disabilities as people first and use appropriate terminology, which conveys a sense of inclusion.
- Work to eliminate or lessen constraints to involvement.
- Strive to make hunting and shooting activities accessible to all individuals.

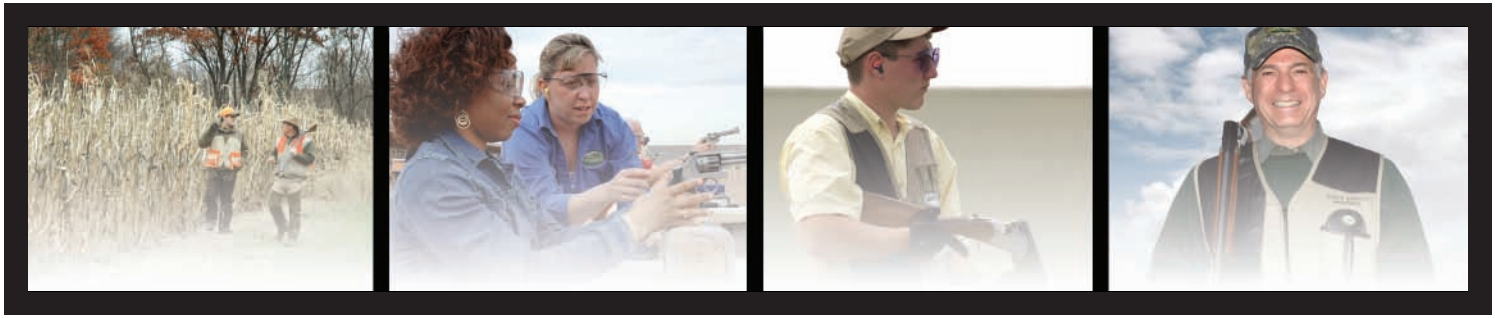
- Conform to appropriate legislation.
- Provide pre-training and continual training of staff.
- Provide appropriate ratio of instructors to students.
- Include accessibility information in all marketing and informational materials.

Research on people with disabilities shows they have the same motivations and educational needs as others participating in outdoor recreation activities. With the use of assistive devices, universal design, and some additional planning, you can make your hunting and shooting programs available to everyone.

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ENHANCING HUNTER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Hunter education programs play an important role in training new hunters to be safe, responsible members of the hunting community. Although hunter and shooter recruitment and retention is not the primary goal of hunter education, the content, instructors, and venues used in hunter education often can provide unique opportunities for R&R.

Define the Goal and Content

As with R&R programs in general, hunter education programs should have well-defined goals and objectives, and these should align with the standards set forth by the International Hunter Education Association. Where possible, instructors should look for ways to provide hunter and shooter R&R opportunities.

Instructors are Key!

Hunter education programs are only as good as their instructors. Selection, preparation, training, and retraining (continuing education) are critical to ensure the accurate and consistent delivery of key messages to your students. Agencies that offer advanced or specialty courses should also consider advanced training for these instructors to ensure they are qualified.

Focus on the Students

To be most effective, hunter education programs should be “learner-centered;” that is, they should be built around techniques and approaches that will be most effective for the students, not what will be easiest or most expedient for the instructors or the agency. Some Best Practices to help you accomplish this goal include:

- Utilize a variety of approaches to increase student participation
- Make the learning experiential (don’t just lecture—let them try things!)

- Use multiple teaching methods to accommodate diverse learning styles (not everyone learns the same way—let them see, hear and touch)
- Provide multiple ways for student to act on what they’ve learned (a classroom session followed by a field session is a good approach).

Reduce Barriers to Training

Hunter education has the opportunity to be an effective tool for hunting and shooting recruitment and retention, but under certain circumstances, it also can be a barrier or deterrent to participation. Some ways to keep hunter education from being a barrier:

- Offer training frequently and on a predictable schedule—although this can be a hassle for the agency and for instructors, try to make it as easy as possible for people to find courses when it is convenient for them.
- Offer training that is well advertised and easily accessed—logistics can be extremely challenging, but try to offer courses throughout the state (even rural areas), and be sure to promote your courses as widely as possible as soon as the dates and times are set.
- Provide “apprentice” opportunities if possible—give people the chance to try hunting (with a certified/licensed adult present) to see if they like it before they are required to invest the time to complete hunter education.

Collaborate with Partners

There are many groups who share your interest in hunter education. Partners can be an invaluable source of mentors, equipment, expertise and other resources. They also can help get the word out about upcoming courses.

- Conservation organizations
- Shooting ranges
- Hunting/conservation clubs
- Outdoor retailers
- Field trial clubs and organizations
- Schools and churches
- Community organizations
- Youth groups

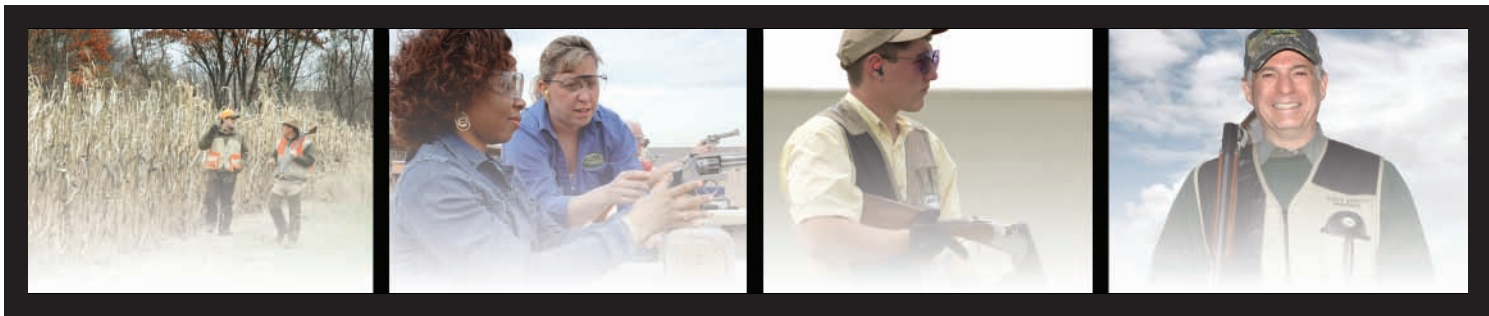
Don't Forget Social Context

Research clearly shows that the social context in which education takes place is at least as important as the methods used to teach the concepts. In fact, the influence of the community within which the behavior will occur may be the strongest force acting on the behavior, regardless of instruction or other treatment. If you do not incorporate the community and cultural context of your learners into your hunter education program, it is likely to remain abstract and outside their scope of experience. This is a compelling argument for collaborating with partners in the community who will help provide the social context for hunting and shooting after the hunter education course is long over.

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HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOUR PROGRAM IS WORKING? EVALUATION!

Probably the most neglected component of all hunting and shooting recruitment and retention (R&R) programs is evaluation. Far too often programs are based, not on research evidence supporting their effectiveness or on accepted education theory, but only on what another program or agency is doing. And most evaluation efforts rarely report more than simple program outputs such as the number of participants at an event, participant satisfaction, and cost of delivery. What do these simple outputs tell you about how many life-long hunters and shooters you are creating? If you are asked what kind of impact your program is having on the knowledge, attitudes, or behaviors of your audience, how will you answer?

Reap the Benefits

The rarity of formal program evaluations is somewhat puzzling, given what evaluation has to offer. Programs that implement formal evaluation are successful (or on their way to success), because the evaluation process shows you what works and what doesn't. By building on what works and changing or

More information regarding program evaluation can be found at the American Evaluation Association web site: www.eval.org.

removing what doesn't, you continually work toward and/or achieve your program goals and objectives.

Following is a brief summary of Best Practices for program evaluation. Chapter 5 of the Workbook explains each of these in detail:

Effective program evaluation is based on program goals and objectives.

In order to evaluate your program, you must have some standard(s) to evaluate it against. Your program goals and objectives are those standards.

Effective program evaluation is a systematic and ongoing process that begins when a program is being planned and carries through implementation.

To be most effective, evaluation must begin before a program is implemented. A systematic evaluation process can help you build your program correctly, adjust it over time, and ultimately achieve the results you are looking for more effectively and efficiently. The first step is to evaluate whether the program is even needed.

Effective program evaluation receives administrative and financial support.

It is a common misconception that program evaluation is only a periodic event. However, evaluation is most effective when it is built into the program. Making evaluation an integral part of your program requires support at every level.

Effective program evaluation helps identify program outputs, such as number of participants and participant feedback.

While collection of program outputs (such as number of participants, cost per participant, etc.) alone is not sufficient for program evaluation, this kind of information is easy and inexpensive to collect, and it is an important piece of the evaluation puzzle.

Effective program evaluation explores and investigates the program's short-term learning outcomes.

If your program is oriented toward fostering knowledge gains and/or skill acquisition (as opposed to behavioral change), it is important that this be done at the end of any program experience. Many audiences will want to know "What did we learn (or come away with)?" Effective programs determine and periodically assess short-term learning outcomes based on objectives and program experiences.

Effective program evaluation explores and investigates the program's long-term benefits and impacts.

Although collection of program outputs such as number of participants is important, effective program evaluation goes beyond that as well. Instructors in effective programs identify the outcomes they expect and continually assess their program's impact on achieving them.

Effective program evaluation encourages the use of multiple and varied assessment methods.

Reliably assessing program outcomes such as the knowledge, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors of participants is difficult. Many methods and techniques are available, and each has strengths and weaknesses. Whatever methods you choose, be sure they are based on the systematic collection of data, and that the data are credible and dependable. The Workbook discusses some commonly used assessment methods. Use multiple methods whenever possible.

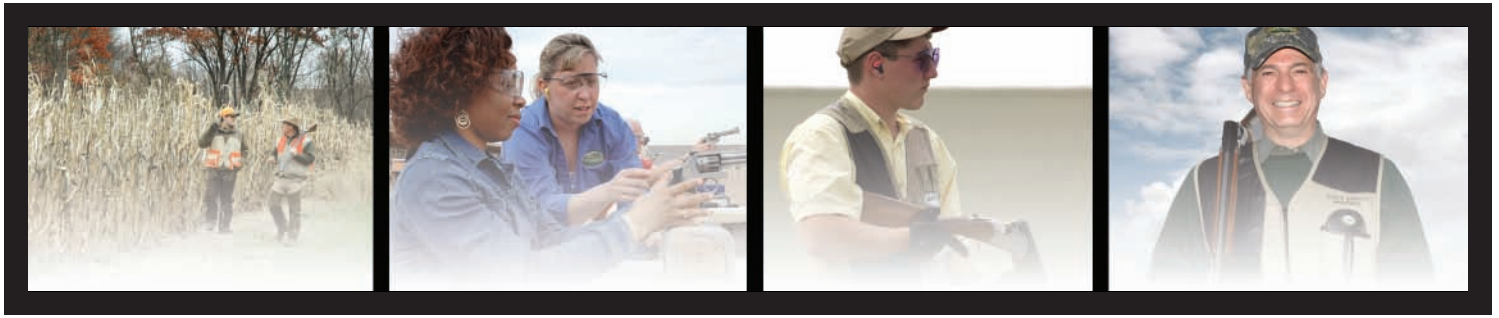
Effective program evaluation allows program staff to take advantage of professional development opportunities relating to evaluation.

One limitation of many educational programs is the lack of trained staff that can plan and carry out evaluations. Encouraging program staff (including administrators, coordinators and instructors) to pursue professional development opportunities in the areas of assessment and evaluation builds greater capacity for staff to apply the results to your program. If your agency or organization lacks this capability, consider building partnerships with institutions, agencies and consultants with experience in conducting formal evaluations.

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INTEGRATED DEPARTMENT-WIDE PROGRAMS

A comprehensive, integrated, and effective recruitment and retention (R&R) strategy is a complex undertaking, and difficult to implement. The effort will not be easy, and it cannot be accomplished by any single division or department. State agencies have a critical role to play, and amazing things can happen with cross-divisional coordination and cooperation.

Solid Commitment

In order to maximize the effectiveness of any R&R program, the entire organization needs to commit to it. Consider creating a special task force that includes top management as well as a cross-section of the agency. This will demonstrate to the entire agency the importance of the issue. Be sure to include field staff as well as women and minorities. The goal of this task force is to analyze your organizations' situation and develop effective programs based on research and demonstrated effectiveness to improve the situation.

Communicate the Commitment

In order to generate the agency-wide level of commitment needed to resolve this issue, its seriousness needs to be communicated—both internally and externally. The critical nature of this issue has economic, social, political and conservation implications that cannot be overstated. Developing sobering statistics using agency-specific data on the decline of hunters and shooters will reinforce the need for immediate and effective R&R efforts.

Chart Your Course

Success does not happen by accident. Effective R&R efforts are based on comprehensive, integrated plans that identify specific goals, objectives, strategies, evaluation mechanisms and resources needed to be successful. These plans are critical for strategic decision making and evaluating your program's success.

You should not fear the prospect of developing these types of plans. However, you should be cautious about who develops them. The fields of marketing and promotion have as much of a body of knowledge to support them as the biological sciences. You wouldn't ask or expect a marketing expert to write a deer management plan; why would you ask a deer biologist to develop a marketing plan?

Having a marketing expert on staff would be ideal, but is not a requirement for your initial efforts. All of the expertise you need can be obtained on a contract basis. Try to find marketing/communication firms that understand your agency and hunting and shooting sports.

The good news is that, if well done, R&R programs can pay their own way by increasing license sales for agencies and memberships for organizations. As the old advertising principle goes, you have to spend money to make money.

Who's "Minding the Store?"

While R&R efforts need to be an agency- or organization-wide priority, it is important to have a dedicated staff person to coordinate all of the activities that you may have going on. If you try to spread the coordination role over multiple staff positions—all of whom already have more work than they can get done—the chances of success are very slim. Your R&R plan needs a dedicated staff person who is thinking about and working on R&R issues every day. Careful coordination and evaluation of activities is critical for the program's long-term success.

Coordination activities include those within your agency or organization's program as well as those needed to integrate and leverage your program with your partners' programs. Leveraging your activities with the activities of others is the most effective and cost-efficient manner of delivering consistent messages to your targeted audiences.

Share Success!

Sharing your success stories and how you accomplished them is critical to get others involved. Nothing breeds success like success.

Well-documented case studies of the actions you took and your results will greatly assist your R&R efforts by showing others that success is possible and that R&R work is a worthwhile investment. Defining success is a critical part of the planning process.

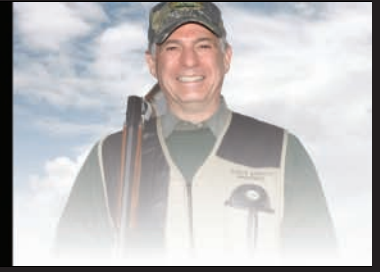
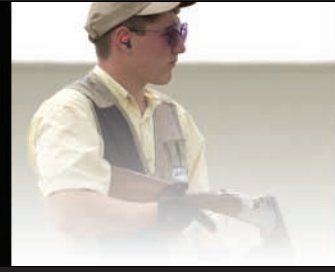
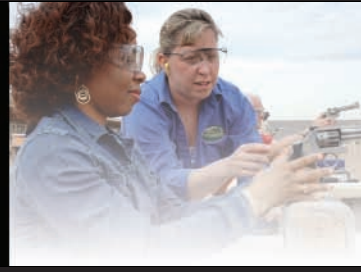
Sharing results is important even if your goals were only partially met. Documenting the steps you took, what you learned and what corrective actions you will be taking to improve your success is important in the learning process. Sharing this learning process with others enhances your credibility by demonstrating your commitment to solving this important issue, and your willingness to apply adaptive management processes to your program.

The key is learning and improving each time you conduct an activity. Also share what you have learned with others.

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MENTORING

Mentors provide an important mechanism for new participants to develop technical skills, as well as the social competence to become a long-term hunter or shooter. The concept of being socially competent may be new to some planners of recruitment and retention (R&R) programs. This is a fancy term for understanding and adopting the norms of behavior, etiquette, and belief system of hunters or shooters. These attitudes and beliefs, while often very subtle, are important to “fit in” with the group—to see yourself as a hunter or shooter. Having a guide or mentor to assist in this process makes “joining” much easier and less awkward.

Most recruitment programs and events have largely focused on developing technical competence with little or no consideration for influencing social competence. Technical competence is also a critical element of recruitment, but even people with a high level of skill will not likely continue these activities if they don’t see themselves as fitting in with the group.

Qualified and Enthusiastic

Mentors don’t need to be master hunters or expert shooters to be qualified. They need to have adequate technical skills, but more important is that they have the enthusiasm and the interpersonal skills to be able to transfer the technical and social skills to become a hunter to another person.

Keep it Local

Mentoring is most effective when mentors and activities are based in the local community. This is where most people will find social support for these activities, and it will help reduce the perception that hunting and shooting are “exotic” activities that occur only in far-away places.

Keep it Up!

Even when mentors are involved, the development of a life-long hunter or shooter requires multiple

exposures to the activities over some period of time. Not all these exposures need to be highly structured—some may not even involve firearms (gun shop visit, game dinner, etc.). But mentors need to stay engaged with their new participant until that person sees him or herself as a hunter or shooter.

Train the Mentors

Develop specific goals and objectives for your mentoring program and share those with your mentors in a formal way. Be sure they know what you expect of them. Give experienced, skilled mentors a chance to share their experience with less experienced mentors. Provide opportunities for continuing education as part of the mentor recruitment process.

Check Them Out

Don’t assume that just because someone volunteers to become a mentor in your program that they are qualified to do so. Careful screening processes should be in place prior to recruiting mentors. Evaluate mentors regularly against a set of carefully selected criteria. Any mentor that does not measure up to these requirements and expectations should be provided remedial training, allowed to co-mentor with a highly successful mentor, or if these efforts are unsuccessful, be terminated. Having specific, written procedures in place to terminate mentors is critical to avoid unpleasant situations, misunderstandings or legal action.

Recognize and Reward

Don’t take your mentors for granted. Most are not overly concerned with personal recognition, but everyone likes to know that their efforts are appreciated. Simple thank-you letters, mementos, service awards, recognition dinners, stories about the program being published in newspapers, etc. are often all that it takes to keep them engaged and energized about the program.

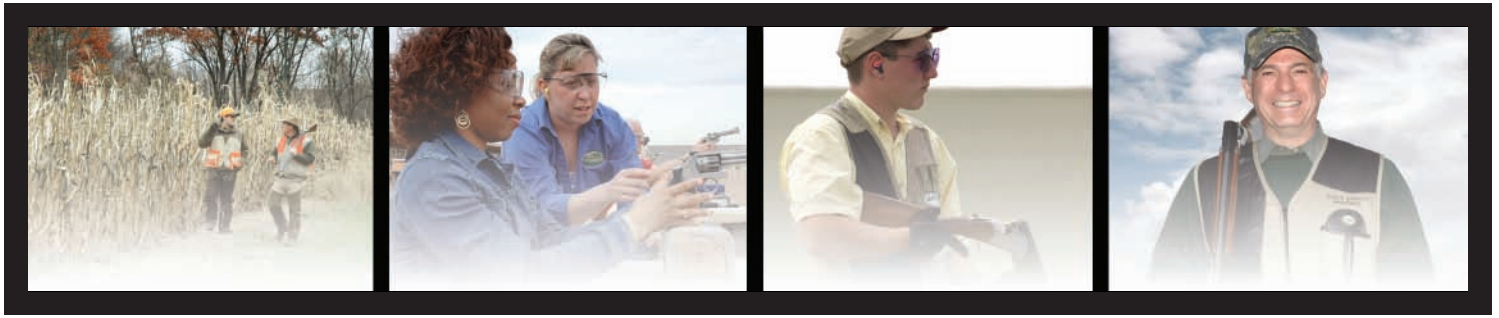
Partner Where Possible

Developing a mentoring program from scratch can be a complex effort. However, there may be existing programs that can help. For example, the Big Brothers and Big Sisters programs often assist with mentoring outdoor skills programs. These organizations already have volunteer training, screening and evaluation programs in place. What they need (and often are looking for) is a new focus to recruit more volunteers into their program. Leveraging these and other similar programs can save tremendous effort and help you be more effective. Not all mentoring organizations will be interested in partnering with the hunting and shooting sports. However, there are many mentoring organizations that should be given the opportunity to join your effort.

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OUTREACH AND MARKETING

Information, education, outreach, awareness, marketing, promotion. All these terms have specific meanings, but most people use them interchangeably. Knowing the correct term to use is not nearly as important as knowing what you are trying to accomplish with the effort. For example, using outreach tools and techniques may be hopelessly ill-suited for achieving overall marketing objectives, and vice-versa.

The Best Practices Workbook has an entire chapter on Outreach and Awareness, and another entire chapter on Marketing and Promotion, to help you make sense of these related but different concepts.

Outreach and Awareness

The following list contains some recommendations from the Outreach and Awareness chapter. This is not a comprehensive list, and a carefully thought-out action plan should guide you in determining where you should best spend your outreach resources. However, you should consider this list as you develop and implement outreach efforts in your recruitment and retention plan.

NOTE: These items cannot truly be called Best Practices, because they have not been tested and proven through careful evaluation. However, they do represent the best professional judgment of experts in the field of hunting and shooting R&R, and should be implemented with careful evaluation to validate effectiveness.

- Provide timely forecasts of game populations.
- Consider species-specific skill workshops.
- Provide information about opportunities beyond the program.
- Consider needs of ethnic groups.
- Encourage hunter education in schools.
- Incorporate hunting's role in conservation.

- Communicate the economic impact of hunting and shooting.

See the Workbook for more details on all of these recommendations.

Marketing and Promotion

Marketing and promotion are fields of endeavor that can have tremendous benefits in hunting and shooting R&R activities. Unfortunately, most natural resources agencies and hunting and shooting organizations have only a vague notion of what marketing really is or what it can do to help them achieve their R&R goals. Most do not have marketing expertise on their staffs, and many do not invest nearly enough thought or other resources into taking advantage of what marketing and promotion have to offer.

Basically, marketing is learning what your customers or constituents want or need, and then providing it.

Marketing has four basic components (the “four Ps”):

- **Product** – The object or service provided. In this case, hunting and shooting equipment, licenses, and opportunity.
- **Price** – The amount a customer or constituent pays for the product.
- **Place** – The physical location where the product can be purchased. (It also can be virtual—as in Internet presence).
- **Promotion** – All of the communications that a marketer may use to get the word out about the product in the marketplace.

Marketers are specialists whose role is to provide the product with the right combination of the four Ps to maximize sales or participation. Just like providing the right combination of habitat variables to maximize pheasant or fish production, successful market-

ing requires training, expertise, and experience to be done effectively.

Best Practices for Marketing and Promotion:

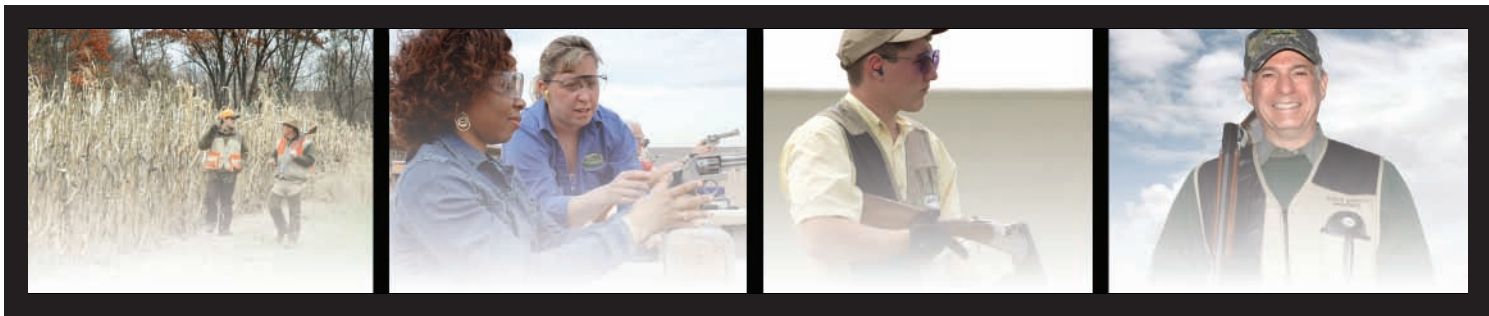
- Understand what marketing is—and what it isn't.
- Find and hire staff/contractors with marketing expertise.
- Incorporate research-based marketing plans and techniques.
- Identify specific target audiences.
- Establish relationships with local media.
- Establish liaisons with state and local conservation organizations.
- Evaluate marketing efforts.

See the Workbook for more details on all of these recommendations.

FOR MORE INFORMATION...

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MAKE YOUR HUNTING RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION PROGRAM THE BEST IN THE NATION!

What would it take?

What would it take to make your Retention and Recruitment (R&R) program the best in the nation? The instructions are ready and waiting in the Best Practices for Hunting and Shooting Recruitment and Retention materials that are now available.

Need for Best Practices

“Tradition” is often used to explain hunting. But what really does it mean? State agencies know that the way to recruit and retain hunters—and to motivate hunters to mentor others—is to reach them where they live: their families, friends and social bonds. Hunting also is a way to keep people connected to and supportive of conservation. It is an important part of conserving nature and passing it on.

Each year, millions of people go hunting, but the number has been gradually declining year after year. How do agencies recruit and retain more hunters? Does participation in events contribute to agency revenues, image, or mission; or to increased license sales; or to a greater stewardship ethic among participants? There is little direct evidence that these and other program goals are being achieved. The hunting community has identified this as a major need and concern.

The National Shooting Sports Foundation® (NSSF®) and its partners have engaged in the Best Practices Project to help meet this need. Tools developed in this project are designed to help build, enhance, and evaluate R&R programs based on research and practices shown to be effective. These tools serve as evidence to decision-makers, administrators and publics that best practices do exist and that agencies and their partners are accountable for using them.

How Can Best Practices Help You?

Best practices are meant to enhance, not replace, existing efforts.

Materials developed for the Best Practices project do not constitute a “program” unto themselves. Rather, they are tools you can use to make your existing (or developing) programs more effective.

Incorporation of best practices will maximize your effectiveness in:

- planning, developing, and implementing programs;
- providing ongoing professional development;
- conducting program evaluations at all levels of development and implementation; and
- identifying relevant research to further understand and improve programs.

What Tools are Available?

The following Best Practices tools are available from NSSF:

- **Workbook** – a comprehensive, interactive guide to incorporating research-based, tested, effective ideas into your R&R efforts. As you complete the exercises in the workbook, you are developing a plan for making your program as good as any in the nation.
- **Fact Sheets** – Twelve fact sheets like this one give a brief overview of various best practices and how they benefit R&R efforts and sponsoring agencies and organizations.
- **PowerPoint Presentation** – A comprehensive presentation that includes segments on various aspects of Best Practices tools. It is designed to be customized for use with numerous target audiences, to communicate the importance of best practices.
- **Trainer’s Guide** – “Cookbook” for conducting a one- or two-day workshop walks end users through the Workbook and motivates them to adopt Best Practices into their programs.

About the Best Practices Project

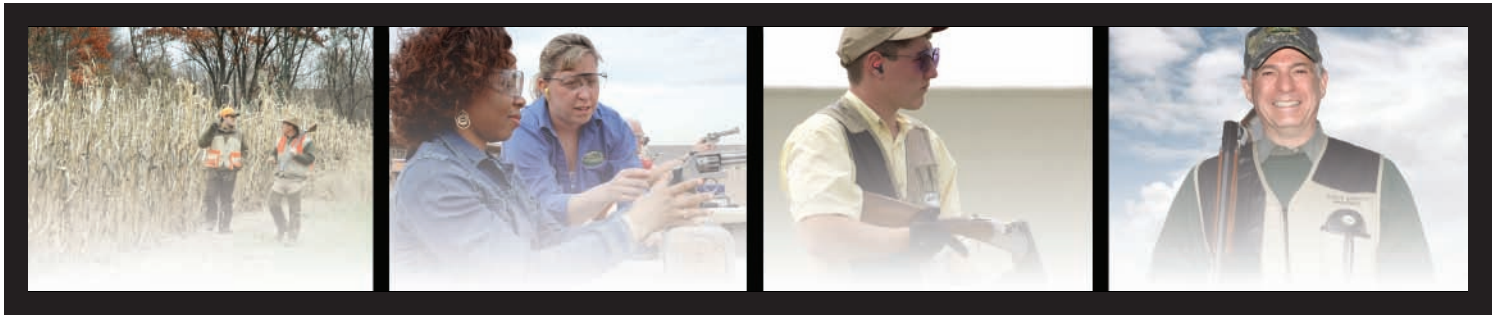
In 2006, the National Shooting Sports Foundation partnered with the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies to convene a think tank of 11 hunting, shooting, education, and conservation experts to compile and review summaries of existing research and recommendations for the development of best professional practices for hunting and shooting recruitment and retention programs. Based on the Think Tank's work, Mile Creek Communications and D.J. Case & Associates created the document, *Best Practices in Hunting and Shooting Recruitment and Retention*, as the foundation for all the tools developed in this project.

The Workbook and other tools also received input from an Advisory Committee of professionals with a variety of backgrounds including education, industry, conservation, volunteer organizations, and practitioners.

FOR MORE INFORMATION...

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PLANNING AHEAD

Best Practices Lead to Successful Programs

The things you do before you contact a single participant can literally be the difference between a program that is effective and exciting, and a program that perhaps makes sponsors feel good, but does not meet your objectives.

Through research and repeated design, delivery, and evaluation, a series of best practices have been developed that can help you plan (or enhance) your program for maximum effectiveness. This fact sheet gives a quick overview of these practices. See the For More Information section on the back for details on how you can learn more about each one.

First Things First

There are several Best Practices that specifically deal with planning. Ideally, most would be implemented simultaneously. However, the first two must come first:

- Effective programs are relevant to the mission of the agency or organization sponsoring the program.

Relevance helps you justify your program and your funding, and makes your program more efficient and sustainable. There are specific ways you can determine if your program is relevant, and improve its relevance if it is not clear.

- Effective programs clearly define their purpose, which includes the program's mission, goals and objectives, and assures that all are aligned with each other.

This may be the most important aspect of program planning, but it is often overlooked. Systematic processes have been developed to help you identify what, specifically, you are trying to accomplish with your program.

The following best practices are best implemented simultaneously, but implementation will benefit your program regardless of timing.

- Effective programs are based on and shaped by some form of needs assessment and/or logic model.

A logic model is a simplified, visual description of how different factors in your program are related. It can help you show cause and effect relationships between activities and outcomes, help improve program design and implementation, and link program development and evaluation.

- Effective programs plan for program evaluation in the initial stages of planning.

Most people recognize that evaluation is a critical part of R&R programs, but many people are not aware that evaluation should begin before a program is implemented to be most effective.

- Effective programs receive adequate support, resources and staffing to become sustainable over time.

Recruitment and retention programs must receive support from the administration at several levels. Financial support is critical. Just as important, administrators must see R&R as an integral part of doing business.

- Effective programs rely on experienced, well-informed, prepared, and ethical staff to develop, implement and evaluate programs.

One of the key ingredients to any successful program is quality staff to provide leadership and work effectively with instructors and participants. And the program should provide ongoing opportunities for staff to receive training and development.

- Effective programs provide opportunities that are frequent and sustained over time.

Research shows that, even when strong, short-term behavioral change occurs, long-term change is doubtful without continued reinforcement. Your programs will be most effective at creating life-long hunters and shooters if they are delivered frequently and sustained over time.

- Effective programs involve stakeholders and partnerships at all levels of program development.

Stakeholders and partners are people who care about your program and are willing to commit to it. They lend a variety of perspectives to your program, helping shape the focus and audience for maximum benefit to all. Effective programs with experience in partnership building have developed a list of tips for developing stakeholder teams. These can be found in the Workbook.

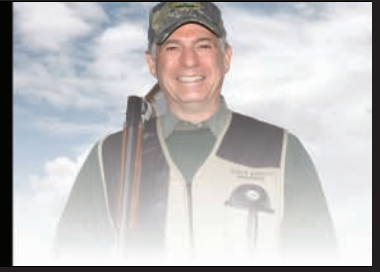
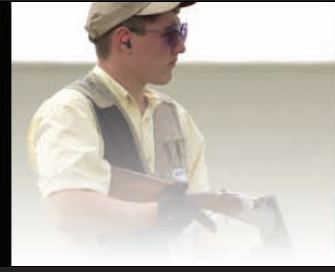
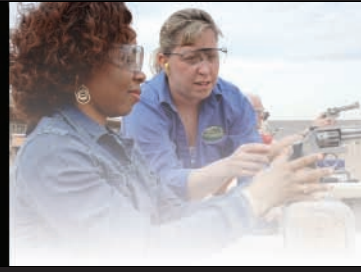
- Effective programs are inclusive of all audiences (accessible/available to anyone with an interest in participating).

Making your program accessible to all individuals regardless of their race, gender, age, or physical characteristics is an important part of program planning. There are important considerations for addressing diverse audiences, as well as audiences with physical disabilities.

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SHOOTING SPORTS IN SCHOOLS AND SPECIAL EVENTS

Great interest has been given to programs that incorporate the shooting sports into schools, and to programs that focus on hunting and shooting special events, such as youth hunts, expos, workshops, etc.

To help make these programs as effective as possible, the Best Practices Workbook contains an entire chapter on each topic, representing the best professional judgment of recruitment and retention experts.

Shooting Sports in Schools

Studies have indicated that as many as 50 percent of high school students have an interest in shooting sports. Taking advantage of this interest through any and every available mechanism is strategically important, and should be given high priority within the hunting and shooting community.

The success of the National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) is an example of the power of the school system as an effective venue, and the volume of the unmet demand for this type of recreation.

Unfortunately, many school systems have adopted a “no tolerance” policy rather than a “let’s learn together” position on firearms in and around schools. This is a major obstacle for bringing these activities into the school system. However, there are good examples of programs that have overcome this hurdle, such as hunter education. There also are alternatives to firearms, such as archery equipment and air-guns, which sometimes are more readily accepted in places where firearms are not.

Even in situations where no shooting of any kind is allowed in the school, there are successful programs where the school serves as an affiliate supporter and the actual shooting activities are conducted off the school properties.

Recommendations for introducing shooting sports to schools:

- Consider implementing programs with an established track record.
- Encourage college courses on hunting/shooting for credit.
- Encourage the creation and/or continuation of conservation clubs.
- Implement hunter education within school systems.
- Encourage shooting as a varsity sport.
- Encourage collaboration between school board and agency.

See the Workbook for more information on all these recommendations.

Special Events

Special events and youth hunts have been a core part of the shooting and hunting communities’ recruitment and retention (R&R) efforts for many years. The role that these activities play in R&R efforts is critical. They are an excellent way to cultivate interest in hunting and shooting activities, and to give people a trial experience. They even can serve as a means to connect new hunters and shooters with potential mentors and additional resources.

However, when viewed in context of the overall R&R picture, special events are not enough to create a life-long hunter or shooter. They must be considered only part of a larger, comprehensive effort. Too often, large numbers of new hunters and shooters are invited to participate in special events, without any thought to what becomes of them after they leave the events.

Following are recommendations designed to clearly define the proper role that special events should play in hunter/shooter R&R.

Recommendations and Best Practices for special events:

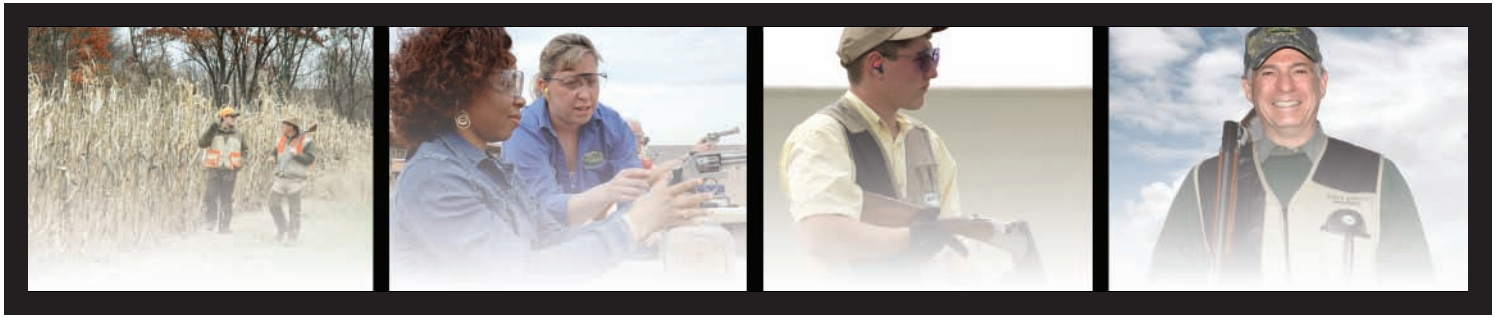
- Don't rely on events alone.
- Align activities with the various stages in the Hunting/Shooting Participation Classification Model and make sure all stages are targeted.
- Identify objectives and expectations.
- Evaluate against objectives.
- Make events experiential.
- Provide loaner equipment.
- Make it fun!
- Put activities in social context.
- Build in follow-up.
- Encourage range days and outdoor skills workshops.

See the Workbook for more information on all these recommendations.

FOR MORE INFORMATION...

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WELL-TRAINED INSTRUCTORS WITH GOOD LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Why well-trained instructors are important

Many recruitment and retention (R&R) programs require instructors, and programs can expand their capabilities by reaching out to partners and training instructors. High quality professional development of instructors goes hand in hand with high quality program or curriculum materials. One without the other will more than likely lead to failure. The content, scope, and level of instruction may be (and probably should be) different for formal educators (school teachers) than for non-formal educators (agency, staff, volunteers, etc.), but the Best Practices are concerned with the process of professional development/training, which should be similar for both.

Teacher or instructor preparation and training are critical to assure the accurate and consistent use of curriculum materials and delivery of program messages. Program evaluations document that many curriculum materials go unused unless supported with in-service training and implementation support for users. Effective training also reduces the possibility of instructors unintentionally misleading learners. Wherever possible, evaluate trainers in the field to ensure they are presenting the material as you intended.

Unfortunately, opportunities for instructor preparation in hunting and shooting R&R are limited. All instructors need professional development programs that focus on education processes and teaching methods, in addition to content. There are many ways you might prepare instructors, including workshops, in-service training, mentoring, and other forms of professional development.

BEST PRACTICES FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Planning

Effective Programs:

- Establish goals and objectives for training.
- Involve partners in educating/reaching a broader audience.
- Provide several layers of training.

Selection

Effective Programs:

- Recruit instructors with experience and knowledge in appropriate subject areas.
- Screen instructors.
- Inform potential instructors and volunteers of what will be expected of them prior to training.

Professional Development Workshops/Sessions

Effective Programs:

- Train instructors in education theory and models of good instructional practices.
- Model effective teaching methods during training.
- Incorporate social support into training.
- Discuss settings for instruction so instructors understand the importance of a safe and appropriate learning environment both indoors and outside.

Evaluation

Effective Programs:

- Provide appropriate models of and approaches to program evaluation.
- Include formative, summative, and long-term evaluation of the trainer, the program, and the trainee.

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