

Best Practices for Hunting and Shooting Recruitment and Retention

Report from the Think Tank Meeting

May 7-9, 2007

Warwick, RI

Meeting Goal:

To identify Best Practices for developing, enhancing, and/or evaluating hunting and shooting recruitment and retention (R&R) programs/projects

Meeting Objectives:

- Review RBFF Best Practices Toolkit and consider its use as a model.
- Conduct a brief review of R&R-related research literature.
- Brief state agency and NGO reports on current R&R efforts.
- Identify *broad topics/categories* of essential R&R Best Practices.
- Identify *specific* hunting and shooting sports R&R Best Practices for inclusion in toolkit.
- Discuss future research needs, communication and distribution needs, and next steps.

Definitions:

Best Practices

For this project, a Best Practice (BP) is defined as a program or practice with specific outcomes that has been clearly defined, refined, and evaluated through repeated delivery and supported by a substantial body of research. These practices represent the best knowledge available for use under specified circumstances. It's important to note that Best Practices may change over time. They are recommendations based on what has been observed or documented to be effective to date, but which may change given additional experience, evaluation, and research.

The group recognized that little research or evaluation has been done on hunting and shooting R&R efforts, so many of the specific, hunting and shooting-based BPs will need to be based on best professional judgment. Other BPs have been tested for fishing, boating and other outdoor R&R efforts and are readily transferable to hunting and shooting R&R efforts.

Recruitment

Recruitment of hunters/shooters has the following elements in its definition:

- A new (“uninitiated”) person who participates in shooting and/or hunting (buys a license) for some period of time (more than just a trial period);
- Creates the self-identity in a person as a hunter or shooter;
- Creates a self-sustaining hunting and shooting population;
- Is a *process* of assisting a non-hunter/shooter to become a hunter/shooter, i.e., the process may be more important than any one activity;
- Is largely targeted at satisfying the latent demand for these recreational activities; and
- Includes the goal of reversing the current trend in the hunter/shooter participation rate.

Retention

A person is considered “retained” when he/she maintains, through self-initiated actions, annual participation in hunting and/or shooting activity throughout his/her lifetime.

Target audiences

The group identified the following as the primary target audiences for the BP tools (audiences who should receive the tools when they are completed and who will use them to make their R&R efforts more effective.)

- State agency directors
- Agency hunting R&R coordinator
- Agency hunter education staff and instructors
- Agency information and education / marketing and promotion staff
- Agency wildlife chiefs
- 4-H shooting sports state coordinators
- Boy Scouts
- Conservation and shooting organizations
- Firearm and ammunition manufacturers
- Federal agencies (FWS, FS, BLM)
- Owners/operators of private and public shooting ranges (NASR)

Presentations

The following Think Tank participants gave presentations to give the group a common understanding of the current R&R situation and landscape.

- Phil Seng, D.J. Case & Associates - Review of RBFF Best Practices Workbook (Workbook was distributed)
 - Plan ahead
 - Build program
 - Instructor training
 - Evaluation
 - Diverse audiences
 - Persons with disabilities
 - Boating education
 - Fishing education
 - Stewardship education
 - Let research help
 - Appendices
 - Glossary
 - Worksheets
 - Logic model

- Bob Byrne, D.J. Case & Associates – review of USFWS R&R survey results (Survey summary document was distributed).
- Richard Stedman, Penn State University – rural sociology
 - Rural strongholds declining
 - Rural/urban fringe increasing
 - Must preserve private land hunting opportunities on rapidly growing rural/urban fringe
 - Open space issues
 - Wildlife damage control for over abundant species
 - Natural amenity areas increasing
 - Community level programs (meso level) – locally relevant – important opportunity for R&R
 - Well-to-do participants w/ political connections in urban/rural fringe may influence macro level politics/support
- Del Benson, Colorado State University
 - Promotion of programs is of paramount importance
 - Adoption sequence
 - Awareness
 - Interest
 - Evaluation (social/family)
 - Trial
 - Adoption/Rejection
 - We must work on programs/ideas at all levels of the adoption sequence
- Jody Enck, Cornell University
 - Apprenticeship
 - Imparting specialized knowledge to a new generation of practitioners
 - Technical competence
 - Practical know-how
 - Theoretical knowledge (what makes a hunter?)
 - Role of mentor: Recognize tasks, provide opportunities, model the proper order or sequence of tasks
 - Social competence (values and norms)
 - Socialization - new role and personal change
 - Social control - keeping apprentice “in line” – safety, ethics, etc.
 - Role of mentor: Fuel socialization – create sense of identity, community
 - Stages of apprenticeship: Introduction, Transmission, Termination
 - Social support
 - Social context and environment in which apprenticeship activities occur
 - Social support model
 - Microsystems – settings in which person is an active participant

- Mesosystems – interfaces between 2 microsystems (social glue)
 - Exosystems – influential social contexts in which the person does not participate (eg., parents jobs)
 - Macrosystems – environment
- Mentors must focus not only on apprenticeship but the social support necessary to recruit and retain

- Frank Briganti, National Shooting Sports Foundation
 - Future of Hunting and Shooting Sports – (Multi-state Grant project)
 - Goals: common rallying point for more coordinated efforts to increase participation
 - Focus groups
 - Messages
 - Must be a priority for state agencies
 - Remind of the need to increase interest because of future
 - Sport shooters much be more willing to take someone along
 - Target shooting as an open door to hunting (build social relationship) – open to the whole family, year round opportunities.
 - Key words
 - Skill development
 - Confidence building
 - Concentration/escape/relaxation
 - Competition
 - Target shooting vs. sport shooting

- Melissa Schilling, National Shooting Sports Foundation
 - Hunting Heritage Partnership – Most Effective Methods (MEM binder handout)
 - TWRA HHP project – integrated marketing approach to license sales
 - Control vs. treatment areas – increased license sales by \$50,000
 - POS information on lapsed hunters – (less than 20% of hunters in the states analyzed hunt every year. The rest are intermittent (info from Phil Seng)
 - IA also did a marketing approach for fishing

- Gary Berlin, International Hunter Education Association
 - Focused on making HE more available and not a barrier to recruitment.
 - R&R programs
 - Ethics and responsibility.
 - New hunting ethics and responsibility DVD (funded by Boone & Crocket Club and Cabelas).
 - Federal Lands Hunting, Fishing, and Shooting Sports Roundtable.
 - On-line HE courses (English and Spanish).

- Jim Simms, 4-H Shooting Sports
 - Active programs in 46 states
 - Occasional turf battle issues w/ state agencies and conservation organizations
 - 3,300 counties in U.S. – opportunities for growth in shooting sports
 - Mentoring programs

- Steve Williams Wildlife Management Institute
 - Hunting Heritage Action Plan – comprehensive and coordinated approach to enhance hunting and conservation.
 - Must coordinate all efforts nationwide (and Canada).
 - Goals: Increase participation rate, opportunities, and funding, and improve public’s recognition of the role and importance of hunters and hunting.
 - Partners: public agencies, academia, private conservation organizations, industry, hunters, and media.
 - Showed initial outline of structure (conceptual approach)
 - Measurable Outcomes
 - Hunter participation rate
 - Acres of hunting access
 - Public support for hunting
 - Conservation funding
 - Delivery of hunting programs
 - Portal or clearinghouse of R&R information and experience

- Terry Erwin, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
 - Youth hunting seasons, license, and special opportunities.
 - Shooting sports programs (mobile sporting clays, NASP, Ag science programs, outdoor days on WMAs).
 - Hunter education deferral program (popular, successful, may encourage hunting without a license among a particular segment—still investigating).
 - Hunter recognition program – mentor program.
 - Hunter Outreach Program (Camps/scouts, shows/expos, special hunts).
 - Big game awards program.
 - Brigades programs.

- Nick Wiley, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
 - 2005 Summit on Future of Hunting
 - Hunter Mentoring license
 - Youth hunt program
 - National Archery in the Schools Program
 - Hunter Safety certification
 - Becoming an Outdoors Woman
 - Summer youth camps, Youth Hunting Education Challenge, Trailblazer events
 - Public hunting areas efforts (WMA program, special hunts, youth regs)
 - Promotion of how and where to hunt
 - New legislation directing donations to youth hunting programs
 - Integrating R&R into game species strategic plans

- Ryan Bronson, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
 - 2002 wildlife roundtable – barriers to hunting participation
 - 2002 wildlife roundtable – proposed solutions
 - 2005 DNR working group – barriers/solutions to hunting participation

- Developed a Hunter Recruitment Plan modeled on the KS R&R plan
 - Outdoor mentors
 - Special hunts
 - Hunting access
 - Shooting opportunities
 - Marketing and promotion
 - Education and awareness

Brainstorming Roundtable

The group discussed the Best Practices Workbook developed by the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation, and decided that most of the broad, process-based BPs in it could be converted to hunting and shooting R&R BPs. They charged DJ Case with making that conversion. The Team preferred to spend its time at the meeting working on content-based BPs specific to R&R issues. They identified 9 broad categories of BPs, and then identified specific BPs beneath each category.

Many of the specific best practices listed are based on best professional judgment.

List of specific best practices

Mentoring

- Recruitment of qualified mentors
- Community-based (local)
- Sustained over time and provide multiple follow-up activities
- Training/continuing education
- Evaluation and procedures for termination
- Integrate with existing efforts (e.g., Big Brothers/Sisters) – provide opportunities
- Recognition
- Flexibility (learning styles, etc)
- Experiential
- Student centered

Creating shooting opportunities

- Safe, accessible ranges or areas – awareness of opportunities
- Provide alternatives where necessary (laser shot)
- Low cost or free
- Provide information on and promote where to find opportunities – (www.rangeinfo.org)
- Encourage industry involvement (leveraging industry resources)
- Partner with private ranges – public range days in exchange for range development funds
- Make it easy, simple, fun – set for success
- Provide instruction/training

Access and awareness

- Provide information on opportunities/areas – database of maps, signs, etc.
- Provide adequate infrastructure – parking, roads, access control, etc.
- Private lands – law enforcement presence, trash clean up.
- Close to population centers
- Provide adequate huntable resources
- Engage community to increase participation
- Landowner recognition programs
- Tax incentives
- Liability waiver issues for private landowners
- Information on how to gain access to private land – hunter/landowner relations

Marketing and promotion

- Use qualified expertise, make it organization-wide
- Commit resources (build a marketing budget for the hunting R&R plan)
- Develop comprehensive, integrated plan/action strategy (POS)
- Marketing should be researched-based
- Identify specific target audiences (strategic marketing)
- Get to know local broadcasters and writers (media)
- Evaluate
- Create liaisons with conservation organizations (state and local)

Education and awareness

- Species-specific skill workshops
- Timely forecasts of game populations
- Provide opportunity information to HE, BOW grads, mentors
- Ethnic group education – translation of regulations/info, clinics
- Encourage hunting education in schools
- Hunting’s role in conservation
- Communicate that hunting and shooting R&R is a serious issue that needs addressed
- Communicate the economic impact of hunting and shooting

Integrated department-wide programs

- Organization-wide commitment
- Assign a staff person to coordinate
- Develop organizational plan
- Coordinate with and share program results with external publics

Maximizing opportunities

- Simplify regulations, make R&R friendly, consistency, convenient, create incentives (youth license, etc).
- Evaluate license/fee structure (e.g., allow non-hunting guests to accompany hunters without license)
- Encourage apprentice opportunities, create database for HE graduates

- Allocate opportunities to new hunters (not just avid participants), allow multiple licenses for hunters/seasons so long as resource supports it.
- HE deferral program. Provide follow-up support.
- Collect contact info for all participants. Monitor and assess future participation.

Shooting sports in schools

- National Archery in Schools Program. Encourage peer participation in schools (4-H ambassadors)
- Encourage Scholastic Clay Target Program
- Encourage Conservation Leaders for Tomorrow program
- Encourage college courses for credit on hunting
- Encourage/creation and or continuation of conservation clubs
- Implement hunter education within schools systems (preferably middle schools, Vocational Ag, industrial arts)
- Encourage shooting as varsity sport
- Encourage collaboration between school board and agency (Nature deficit disorder as entrée)

Special events/hunts

- Loaner equipment
- Collect contact information at hunts for follow up
- Maximize opportunities for success (stocking?)
- Identify objectives and expectations (get beyond preaching to the choir), expand base of *new* participants (angler legacy program)
- Require mentor participation
- Keep it short and fun
- Put in social context (reflection time, social support)
- Encourage creation continuation of shooting sports camps
- Encourage range days
- Encourage agencies to collaborate with ranges
- Integrate R&R into Federal Aid Section 10 contracts with ranges
- Encourage outdoor skills workshops
- Evaluate against objectives
- Make them experiential
- Build in follow-up
- Align activities with the various stages in the “adoption model” and make sure all stages are targeted.
- Don’t rely on events alone

Future Research Needs

The group recognized that, with a few notable exceptions, little specific research has been done on hunting and shooting recruitment and retention programs. The following specific areas were identified as being particularly important for the hunting/shooting community to research/implement in order to recruit and retain hunters and shooters:

- Encourage state agencies to acquire automated licensing systems and mine the data to learn more about their hunting clientele.
- Encourage USFWS to continue R&R analysis of data from the National Survey on Hunting, Fishing, and Wildlife-Related Recreation.
- Develop indicators of social and technical competence for each stage of hunting/shooting adoption.
- Identify the social attributes of a hunter/shooter (when does a person become one?).
- Create a clearinghouse of existing R&R data (National Hunting Heritage Action Plan).
- Implement a nationwide, longitudinal study of hunter education deferral participants (do they buy licenses and participate in following years?).
- Study effectiveness of 4-H shooting sports program, SCTP program and NASP in creating life-long hunters and shooters.
- Research the cross-over relationships between shooting sports and hunting.
- Encourage long-term (longitudinal) monitoring of efforts.

Other ideas

As a final exercise before adjourning, the group mentioned a few other opportunities as areas for future consideration.

- Maximize opportunities (allow more than 1 license/species/yr) if appropriate
 - Hunter education deferral program, Families Afield, etc.
 - Simplify regulations to enhance recruitment and retention.
- Encourage more shooting sports in schools – SCTP, Archery in the Schools, etc.
- Integrate our efforts with the *Last Child in the Woods* movement. Hunting and shooting provide great opportunities to get kids outside, and this national movement is gaining a lot of traction.
- Apprentice to journeyman process – how do you make this work?
- Recognition programs like TX is doing (big game award, first deer award, etc.)
- Explore the possibility of *creating* a positive “tipping point” for hunting and shooting sports participation