



Expanding Your Capabilities: Well-Trained Instructors

This Info Sheet gives a brief overview of the wealth of helpful information you can find in *Best Practices Workbook for Boating, Fishing, and Aquatic Resources Stewardship Education (Workbook)*. See the back for details.

Even though teachers and instructors may not be part of your staff, they deliver your information and can reflect back on your organization or agency (for better or worse).

Agencies and organizations that rely solely on their staff for instruction limit the potential of their educational programs. Involve staff in the development of partnerships with schools, communities, youth organizations, and others. Then train teachers or volunteers to work with these groups to expand the number and diversity of individuals you can eventually reach.

Teacher or instructor preparation and training are critical to assure accurate and consistent use of curriculum materials. Program evaluations document that curriculum materials go unused unless supported with detailed, in-service training and implementation support for users. Simply distributing free materials will not result in their use. Educators are more likely to achieve the goals and objectives you have set for your program if you provide training in the use of curriculum materials and teaching strategies.

► Best Practices in Using Well-Trained Instructors

To effectively include teachers and instructors outside the agency/organization staff, successful programs have adequate planning, consider teacher/instructor selection, and use Best Practices in training workshops.

Planning

Establish clear goals and objectives for training, just like you do for your program in general. Without goals and objectives, you won't be able to evaluate whether or not your training activities are having any impact on your instructors and their ability to deliver your program.

Plan and provide for several layers of training, including basic orientation and exposure to program materials, processes, and mechanics. Hold additional training(s) to provide instructors with in-depth exposure to specific program elements or new curriculum areas. Avoid brief, one-shot training sessions.

Teacher/Instructor Selection

Even though teachers and instructors may not be part of your staff, they deliver your information and can reflect back on your organization or agency (for better or worse). Carefully consider those you select to teach. You are not obligated to use an individual just because he or she volunteers. Not everyone will make a good instructor. You might want to have some volunteers do other tasks. By developing guidelines that address the types of teachers and instructors you want, you can assure that you select and sustain high quality individuals.

Interview instructors to help identify their motivations, commitment, ethical behavior, knowledge, and ability to work with diverse groups.

Model effective teaching methods during training You can talk about effective methods all you want, but if you don't teach by example, it is not likely your instructors will apply these techniques when they teach their students.

Recruiting instructors with experience and knowledge in your chosen subject areas and then building on that through training results in better instructors and better implementation of your program with less effort spent by your organization.

Before training begins, inform potential teachers and instructors what will be expected of them after they are trained. You don't want to spend time and money training individuals who never use the training.

Professional Development Training Train instructors in sound educational theory, including:

- Make information relevant to learners.
- Empower learners.
- Use learner-centered approaches.
- Use a variety of teaching methods to address diverse learning styles.
- Understand the developmental stages of learners.

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Provide and sustain social support. Effective programs incorporate three levels of social support into training. Two levels are for the teachers and instructors. The third is for learners.

1. Facilitate a network among instructors and teachers:
 - Provide ice breakers to encourage relationship development and increase content level.
 - Put participants into teams during training exercises.

- Provide opportunities for peer discussion and socializing.
- Encourage participants to attend in teams so they leave with built-in partners. If instructors feel isolated, it is harder for them to stay motivated. You can enhance their confidence and beliefs in the program by providing an avenue to network with others offering similar programs.

2. Follow up with teachers/instructors after the training sessions through site visits, e-mails, phone conversations, and newsletters. Provide awards and other motivations to keep them involved.

3. Give instructors examples of how they can incorporate social support into their programs/classes, such as by involving family members in the program or developing an after-school club.

Conduct training outdoors whenever possible, and help instructors understand the importance of safe and appropriate learning environments, both indoors and outdoors. Discuss liability issues instructors may encounter and how to minimize risks.

Provide instructors with models of and tools for program evaluation. Help instructors assess learner progress and evaluate the effectiveness of their instruction. Effective programs also evaluate the trainer, the training, the program, and the trainee.

FOR MORE INFORMATION...

This information sheet is just the tip of the iceberg. MUCH more information on planning, developing, and evaluating education programs can be found in the *Best Practices Workbook for Boating, Fishing, and Stewardship Education*. The more Best Practices you can incorporate into your program, the greater the chance that your program will achieve the goals you set for it.

To review and/or order copies of this and other Information Sheets, the *Workbook*, or other Best Practice tools and materials, go to: www.RBFF.org/educational/bestpractices.cfm or contact RBFF at: 601 N. Fairfax St. • Ste. 140 Alexandria, VA 22314-2054 • 703 519 0013