



SUMMARY OF AUDIENCE NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF MUNICIPAL OFFICIALS 2002

INTRODUCTION

The Massachusetts Coastal Training Program (CTP) provides needed information, tools, and skills to “coastal decision makers” – or people making decisions that affect the health of our coasts in their day-to-day professional or volunteer lives. By coordinating and planning training opportunities, workshops, and other events, CTP can help communities better manage the coastal resources so vital to their economies and way of life.

The Massachusetts CTP is coordinated by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management’s Waquoit Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (WBNERR), the Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management (CZM), and the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution Sea Grant Program (WHOI Sea Grant). CTP is a nationwide effort of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s National Estuarine Research Reserve System. To learn more about CTP and how to get involved, visit the website <http://www.coastaltraining.org>.

CTP partners conducted an audience needs assessment of local municipal officials in the summer of 2002. The purpose was to evaluate the training, information, and skill requirements of coastal decision makers in local governments.

METHODOLOGY

To gather responses, CTP partners used small group interviews and a questionnaire that was sent to 2,258 individuals (1,596 volunteer board members and 662 employees) in 74 Massachusetts coastal communities. Participants were asked to indicate their interest in both scientific topics (such as nitrogen loading and nutrient management) and process skills (such as conflict resolution). Respondents were also asked to indicate their preferences with regard to delivery format, and training times and locations.

RESULTS

Question: *What local officials are most likely to attend training?*

On average, conservation commissioners and staff report the highest level of participation in training, followed by health boards and staff, then coast-related committee members and staff (e.g., shellfish constables). Employees report a higher level of participation in training than volunteers. Finally, respondents from the Cape & Islands region have, on average, a higher level of participation in training than those from other parts of the coast.

Question: *What delivery formats are preferred?*

Workshops and reading materials are the most popular formats, while seminars, case studies, and panel discussions were also selected by at least 40% of the respondents. Results indicate that employees prefer hands-on training, simulations (e.g., role playing), fact sheets, and technical assistance by phone.

Volunteers prefer training via local meeting presentations. Employees indicate they would prefer the following incentives: certificates, incorporation of training as part of professional association meetings, and endorsement by a professional association.

Question: *What are preferences with regard to training time, location, and other details?*

The preferred days of the week for training are Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday for both volunteers and municipal employees. Saturday and Sunday are better for volunteers than municipal staff. Mornings are preferred by employees, while evening sessions are better for volunteers. The prime months for training are January – March and summer months of June – August should be avoided. Respondents indicated that providing information or training workshops as a component of local meetings in conjunction with professional conferences would be especially convenient. The majority of respondents would travel up to one hour each way to attend training.

Question: Which topics are most appealing?

People indicated their preferences for different subject areas (“content topics”) and skill areas (“process topics”) using a five point scale, with “1” indicating low interest and “5” indicating high interest. The results are summarized in the following table.

1 = low, 5 = high interest	Content Topics	Process Topics
Tier 1 (Average score > 3.75)	Wetland & waterway protection	–
Tier 2 (3.25 – 3.75)	Land use planning Marine pollution Open space protection Habitat protection & restoration Environmental technologies Storm water management Nitrogen loading, nutrient management Special area management Water resources (supply & quality) Coastal access Coastal processes & geology Wastewater management Fisheries (including shellfish)	Explaining coastal issues, laws & regulations Using computer mapping (GIS) Working with other cities and towns Involving the community in planning Improving negotiation & conflict resolution skills
Tier 3 (2.75 – 3.25)	Ecological landscaping Invasive species Disaster response Endangered species Port & harbor planning Aquaculture Renewable energy Dredging	Preparing new staff for their roles Helping staff take on leadership roles Helping volunteers work with professional staff
Tier 4 (< 2.75)	Global warming & climate change Boat / marina management	Improving computer skills [other than GIS] Leading meetings Working with the news media

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon the results of the study, the following recommendations may help training providers target the information needs and preferences of municipal employees and volunteers:

- Provide information via workshops and reading materials. Reading material should be made available both in print and on a web site.
- Offer information or training workshops as components of local meetings and conferences.
- Offer events on Tuesdays, Wednesdays or Thursdays, and, if half-day sessions are sufficient, aim for morning events.
- Consider evening or weekend training sessions when targeting volunteers—many of whom are employed elsewhere.
- Offer training in “off season” months, particularly January through March. Summer months should be avoided, unless the training is season or site-specific and can only be accomplished at that time
- Consider offering incentives to increase attendance. For example, training providers could seek the endorsement or approval of relevant professional associations. Other options include offering certificates and/or continuing education units (CEUs) if applicable.

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