



Summary of Audience Needs Assessment of Volunteer, Advocacy, and Other Non-Governmental Organizations, 2004

INTRODUCTION

The Massachusetts Coastal Training Program (CTP) provides needed information, tools, and skills to “coastal decisions makers” – people who make 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 Conservation and Recreation’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). The CTP is a nationwide effort of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s National Estuarine Research Reserve System. To learn more about the Massachusetts CTP and how to get involved, visit its website at www.coastaltraining.org.

The CTP partners completed an audience needs assessment of non-governmental organization (NGO) staff members in early 2004. The purpose was to understand the training, information, and skill needs and preferences of coastal decision makers in such organizations. (A prior needs assessment of local officials is posted on the Massachusetts CTP web site.)

METHODOLOGY

A telephone interview and an on-line questionnaire were used to assess the interests and preferences of 73 staff members from 54 Massachusetts NGOs regarding training topics, timing, pricing, and location. Forty individuals were interviewed; 34 of those plus 33 others completed the on-line questionnaire. The questionnaire included rating scales for both policy-related scientific topics (such as nutrient loading and invasive species) and process skills (such as “explaining coastal issues to a community or an individual citizen”). The questionnaires provided quantitative ratings on fixed topics; the interviews provided background information on the organizations’ situations and more detail about the types of assistance that could be useful.

RESULTS

Question: *What types of organizations are potentially interested in CTP training and information?*

The study included four basic types of NGOs: environmental and resource-protection organizations; governance, planning, and policy organizations; research and education organizations; and economic- and recreational-interest organizations. Representatives of all four types indicated interest in various training topics listed in the questionnaire, with somewhat different interests from each organization. The organizations vary in lifespan, size, funding, and organizational capacity. Some provide in-house training for their staff and/or volunteers; others have budgets for outside training, while some have little funding and, in some cases, little time for training activities.

For many topics—especially those of a specialized or technical nature—many respondents would be content with informational formats (including factsheets, web-based information, and access to experts) without training events. However, for many of the content topics with the highest “importance” ratings (*table, page 2*) and for most of the skill or process topics, training (or training plus information) is preferred by a slight majority of those who expressed format preferences. Across the board, training only—without supporting informational materials—is not a preferred format.

Question: *What preferences exist with regard to training time, location, and other details?* The preferred days of the week for training are Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. Half-day sessions are generally better than full-day sessions, with no clear preference between mornings and afternoons. Evenings are considered problematic by one-third to one-half of those who responded. Weekdays are preferred over weekends. The majority would drive up to one hour each way to attend training. November appears to be the best month for training, although January, February, March, April, and October received the highest percentage of “good” ratings, and April, May, June, and July received the fewest “bad” ratings.

Question: Which topics are most appealing? People indicated their preference for different 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.

Level of interest (1 = low, 5 = high)	Content Topics	Skill & Process Topics
Tier 1 (Mean ranking > 4.25)	Habitat protection and restoration	-
Tier 2 (3.75 – 4.25)	Wetlands Nutrient loading Water resources Open space protection Storm water management Invasive species Land use planning Protected area management	Explaining coastal issues to a community or an individual citizen
Tier 3 (2.75 – 3.75)	Environmental contaminants Wastewater management Environmental technologies Ecological landscaping Fisheries Endangered species Coastal access Coastal processes & geology Aquaculture	Collaborating: Ways to work together with other organizations concerned with coastal issues Working with the news media Processes for involving the community in planning Developing experiential learning activities about specific coastal issues Selecting & recruiting expert presenters and facilitators for training activities Developing an appropriate set of training and informational activities Learning negotiation & conflict resolution skills
Tier 4 (< 2.75)	Dredging Global warming & climate change Renewable energy Port & harbor planning Boat & marina management Disaster response	Leading meetings

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of the study, the following recommendations may help training providers to target the information needs and training preferences of non-governmental organization staff people:

- Address the high-priority topics as shown in the table above, but with attention to lower-priority topics that are important to particular audience segments and that are not adequately addressed elsewhere.
- Provide information via informational materials (brochures, factsheets, web-based information) and—for the higher-priority topics—by workshop.
- Offer events mostly on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, or Thursdays.
- November is a good month for training events; otherwise, no strong month preferences emerged.
- Partial-day events are preferred by most members of this audience.
- Provide training locations that keep most participants’ one-way travel time under one hour.
- To attract and serve this potential audience, keep materials and activities well focused, with attention to the NGOs’ need to reach and inform their broader audiences.

The full report of this needs assessment may be found on the Massachusetts CTP website, www.coastaltraining.org.

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