

OFFICER TRAINING BULLETIN 93-05

TRAINING ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

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INTRODUCTION

GWRRRA Leadership Training, or any training for that matter, should be viewed as a process, not a single or particular event. It can be accomplished in a variety of ways, ranging from one-on-one discussions to large seminars designed to train hundreds of people at once. There is no one "right way". There is only a "most effective" way to train based on pre-defined objectives which change depending on the objectives to be accomplished. It is important for Region and District Directors and Trainers to define what training objectives need to be accomplished and then decide what is the best way to train for meeting those objectives. Focused training events, such as workshops, are one way to accomplish training objectives and are a major component of any successful officer training effort. There are additional events at which training can and should be made available. These include but are not limited to staff meetings at all levels, rallies, and progress reviews.

This bulletin summarizes the major components and considerations associated with planning and conducting training workshops and other events conducted specifically for the purpose of providing training. These considerations hold true for Region and District Workshops as well as other organizational training. Each of the approaches outlined below has both strong and weak points and none is all inclusive. They can and should be tailored to meet the needs of a particular Region or District organization. The important thing to remember is to clearly describe what you want to accomplish and then use some combination of the ingredients outlined below to accomplish your training goals.

DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of the GWRRRA Leadership Training Program the following definitions apply:

SEMINAR - A seminar is a single training session devoted to a particular topic.

WORKSHOP - Workshops are training meetings at which multiple seminars are presented. This term can also refer to any event conducted primarily for the purpose of providing training regardless of the material presented, be it a single GWRRA training program, or selected seminars. They vary in terms of their length, focus, and the number of different topics or sessions included in the agenda.

PLENARY SESSION - Plenary sessions are group training sessions in which all trainees meet together in a single simultaneous training experience. For example, a Regional Director calls their staff together to train them on revised reporting procedures and the material is presented to all attendees at the same place and time. Plenary sessions usually include all of the participants attending a given training event. They are used when training objectives call for presenting or disseminating information rather than having extensive interaction between the instructor and those being trained. In a plenary session interaction between the instructor and trainees is generally limited to questions and answers.

Strengths and Weaknesses - Plenary sessions can train many people at once. They are easier to organize, conduct, and control. However, they limit the ability of the instructor to interact with the audience, and thus the variety of topics that can be presented as well as the presentation methods used. They also require a larger facility.

BREAKOUT SESSIONS - Breakout sessions are smaller, shorter, more intimate sessions that focus on specific topics. They are commonly organized in related topical groups with trainees moving from one session to another in series. They usually include active discussion, participation or interaction between the instructor and trainees. Breakout sessions are often conducted in parallel with several topics being presented at the same time in separate sessions.

Strengths and Weaknesses - These sessions provide more opportunity for discussion, interaction, and feedback between participants and the instructor. They are somewhat more complicated to plan and conduct because several may be ongoing at the same time. They also require more meeting rooms and instructors.

PLENARY/BREAKOUT SESSIONS - These are combination sessions in which both presentation formats are used. For example, a morning plenary session is used to present topics of common interest to all in attendance followed by afternoon track or breakout sessions that present a series of topics focused toward specific groups of people such as Chapter Directors vs Newsletter Editors vs Rider Educators vs Event Planners, etc.

Strengths and Weaknesses - This type of workshop requires more organization and planning, more meeting rooms, and more instructors. It also provides the highest amount of latitude in terms of the number and variety of topics that can be presented.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Regional/District Director is the "responsible person" at training workshops. They are assisted by such staff members as are needed to successfully plan, organize, and conduct the event. Chief among these is the Region/District Trainer. The Trainer should be the "active ingredient" in planning and conducting workshops. Directors should make extensive use of these experts in developing the workshop agenda and identifying topics, instructors, and coordinating workshop activities. Typically, the Trainers should be delegated the authority to organize and conduct the workshop under the direction of the responsible officer.

Instructors are the individuals who actually present the training material to the trainees. They also facilitate group discussions, and organize their presentations under the direction of the Trainer. While latitude in presentation styles should be given to Leadership Training Instructors in developing their presentations, they must clearly understand the training objectives designated for their presentations and develop and present them accordingly.

SETTING TRAINING OBJECTIVES

To be most effective, training workshops must be focused on specific training objectives. Training objectives are statements that describe what those being trained need to know. These objectives are developed to meet specific training needs as defined by the responsible Region/District Director and his/her staff. For example, if a region is having difficulty in developing quality newsletters or getting accurate and timely financial reports, they might wish to provide the needed information by conducting breakout sessions on newsletter requirements, writing and communications skills, chapter record keeping, and GWRRA reporting procedures. These sessions would provide the skills and abilities needed to meet the defined training objectives of developing quality newsletters and accurate and timely financial reports.

DEVELOPING THE WORKSHOP AGENDA

AGENDAS - An agenda should be developed in advance for each training event. It should include times, locations, session schedules, points of contact, and related information helpful to prospective attendees.

The workshop agenda must be geared to meeting the pre-defined training objectives. Typically, it should include a plenary session at which attendees are welcomed, appropriate introductions made, and administrative announcements and instructions are given. A copy of the agenda should be provided, preferably in advance, to each participant. Following the general session, either plenary or breakout sessions should commence that deliver the desired training.

Careful planning and agenda setting must precede each workshop. Sessions should be so timed that participants have opportunities for appropriately spaced breaks and other unstructured time. Including some free-time in the agenda allows participants to relax, socialize, and share information. This "unstructured" time often produces some of the best peer training and information exchange of the event. A general rule of thumb is that breaks of at least 10 minutes should be included at least every hour.

SELECTION OF TOPICS AND INSTRUCTORS

Matching Topics and Instructors with Training Objectives -

For the training to accomplish what is intended, a match must be made between the pre-defined training objectives, the topics, and the instructors. Simply put, this means selecting seminar topics that will provide the information needed by the trainees to achieve the objectives. For example, you wouldn't teach a newsletter preparation seminar if the objective is to train leaders on how to conduct effective meetings.

Matching topics and instructors is equally important. Select people as instructors who have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to teach the assigned topic. Officers should not be used as seminar instructors simply because they are Officers. Seminar instructors must not only have good communication, presentation and organizational skills, they must also know the topic to be presented inside and out. The best instructors will be people with the above skills and characteristics and who have a personal interest in the topic as well. Either the District or the Region Trainer may appoint/select seminar instructors. However, prior to giving a seminar, instructors must be certified in accordance with the guidelines set forth in the LTD Trainers Handbook and approved by the International Director of Leadership Training.

FACILITIES

Facilities can have a significant impact, positive or negative, on the success of any training event. As with topics and instructor selection, facilities should be selected that will support and promote pre-defined training objectives.

MEETING ROOMS - should be large enough to accommodate the trainees in relative comfort but small enough to foster a sense of togetherness and teamwork. A small but crowded room will make the trainees physically and mentally uncomfortable. An uncomfortable trainee will tend to focus their attention on what is making them uncomfortable rather than on the topic being presented.

Rooms can also be too large. A small audience in a large room reduces training effectiveness by fragmenting the audience. They will spread out which makes giving an effective presentation more difficult for the instructor. Instructors need to be able to develop a relationship with their audience to communicate the training material effectively, too much distance between them and their audience makes this difficult. Also, a spread out audience looks and feels less like a team and more like a number of unrelated individuals.

Provision should be made for adequate temperature and air flow control during the presentation. The more crowded the room the lower the temperature should be, and the higher the level of air flow.

For plenary sessions large rooms are best due to the number of people likely to be attending at the same time. A raised podium for the speaker is usually required. Chairs should be set up "theater" style with as many rows of chairs as are needed to seat everyone comfortably. (A little extra room between chairs is nice and adds to the comfort level.) In some cases chairs may be set up with tables as well, although this will depend on the size of the room, the number of attendees, and whether or not the trainees are expected to take notes. When tables are included the seating style is referred to as "classroom" seating. Breakout rooms are usually smaller and physically separated. Chairs may be arranged in rows, a circle, or around a table. This set-up promotes effective interaction between those attending.

Because of the need to see and hear (to be trained), public address equipment in plenary sessions is usually a must, as is a raised podium. It is not usually needed in breakout sessions.

LOCATION - Select a training location as central as possible to the geographic area from which most of the trainees are expected to travel. This however, is secondary to the quality and utility of proposed meeting place as a training facility.

COSTS - are a major consideration for training sessions, particularly those held at hotels or convention facilities. Charges for use of the meeting rooms, set-up of tables and chairs, and audio/visual equipment are normal but usually negotiable. If the training is being held at a hotel, the more sleeping rooms rented by the organization, the more willing the hotel will be to provide free or reduced rates for services or meeting rooms. Travel costs should also be factored into workshop planning, both for the planners and the attendees.

Regional and District Directors may charge participants a small fee, if necessary, to offset workshops costs. However, these charges should be kept to a minimum, as workshop costs should be included in the annual Region or District operating budget. All expenses for attending officially sponsored training functions may be allocated from chapter or district funds.

WORKSHOP LENGTH

The workshop should be no longer than is required to meet the training objectives. Usually, two seven or eight hour training days is sufficient to provide all the training a person can effectively absorb at one event. If the established training objectives can be accomplished in less time, use less time. The desired affect is to have the trainees leave the workshop feeling like they would like to have had more time to invest rather than having been there too long. Also, travel time to and from the workshop should be considered when developing the workshop agenda.

Session length should be determined by the topic, its complexity, the depth to which it needs to be covered, and the need for trainee discussion or questions. Some topics can be addressed sufficiently in a few minutes, others need more time. Single-topic sessions should not generally exceed 50 minutes including time for questions.

USE OF TRAINING AIDS AND RESOURCES

Handouts and visual aids are excellent training tools. However, their coordination and development should be the responsibility of the instructors. If large numbers of copies are to be provided, the responsible person may wish to use consolidated printing services to reduce expenses. Many training facilities can only provide limited document reproduction services on site, and then usually at an elevated cost. Handouts should be developed ahead of time and provided either as part of the workshop packet, or at the end of the presentation. It is not recommended that handouts be given to the attendees during the presentation. Doing so results in shifting the attention of the attendees from the Instructor to the handouts.

Provision should be made in advance for public address systems and audio/visual equipment. Instructors are responsible to advise the workshop coordinator of these or any other special needs in advance of the workshop. All of these items should be checked out in advance to eliminate possible disruptions.

TRAINEE CONSIDERATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS -- THEIRS AND YOURS

Mutual understanding of what the trainees expect and what is expected of them can contribute much to the success of a training workshop. As the "Responsible Party", your expectations should be defined in advance of the workshop and provided to the potential attendees as part of the advance information package. You should try to anticipate what the trainees expect and build that into the agenda. Conducting informal advance surveys may be useful as part of organizing the workshop to determine what the trainees will come expecting to accomplish or experience.

MAKE VERY SURE THAT LOTS OF F-U-N IS BUILT INTO THE LEARNING AND SHARING EXPERIENCE.

USE OF BREAKS AND FREE TIME

INFORMALITY - With few exceptions the most fertile training environment will be one based on informality. This informality fosters an opportunity for the trainees to relax and focus on each of the topics being presented. While some level of formality is needed to maintain order and training quality, the general mood should be one of friendliness and trust. Remember, training workshops are GWRRA events and, as such, should be informal and FUN.

SMOKING VS NON-SMOKING - Many locations and municipalities have established non-smoking policies or ordinances for meetings. GWRRA training events will adhere to such policies or ordinances as are applicable at a given location. All things being equal, the GWRRA Leadership Training Division strongly encourages workshop planners to conduct non-smoking training sessions and plan sufficient breaks and locations to accommodate those trainees wishing to smoke.

SOCIAL EVENTS - These can have a significant positive impact on the success of a workshop. Sufficient time should be included in the training schedule to allow time for socializing and relaxation. Well timed breaks and get-togethers can actually enhance the effectiveness of the training by allowing trainees to relax, clear their heads, and rejuvenate for the next session. Providing an opportunity to have some fun as a part of the training experience is a mandatory part of any workshop agenda.

EVALUATION AND REPORTING

EVALUATIONS - As part of each workshop participant packet, trainees should be provided with a written workshop evaluation form. These evaluations should be completed and returned to the Region/District Trainer at the conclusion of the workshop. Evaluations are extremely important. They provide the only immediate feedback on the success of the workshop or seminar and may be the best way to determine how to improve future training events.

Evaluations should be brief and easy to complete, either at the end of the workshop or as sessions are completed throughout the event. They need to be carefully designed so as to collect the information the Trainer and Region/District Director really wants to know. Negative feedback is easily as important as positive feedback. When analyzing evaluations, do not view each response independently. Watch for similarities between responses and overall trends.

Evaluations should be tailored for each workshop and collect information the responsible operations officers and trainers need to know to administer a successful training program. General guidance for evaluation questions is described below.

- Was the workshop informative?
- Would you recommend it to another officer/member?
- Would you attend future workshops?
- What topic was the most/least interesting?
- What topics would you like to see included in future training workshops?
- How would you improve the next workshop?

To the extent possible questions should be "open-ended" and not lead the trainee toward any particular response. They need to require the respondent to think about their answer. Numerical ratings can also be used to determine areas of interest, effectiveness of particular instructors, quality of the facility, and other quantitative aspects of the workshop. The respondent should ALWAYS be given the opportunity to make original suggestions for improvement. Remember, if they can't describe the problem, they don't have one. Finally, while confidentiality is important it does not preclude giving respondents the option to identify themselves on the evaluation.

REPORTING - Documenting and reporting the proceedings of a workshop can be very useful. This information can help in planning and improving future training events. Any report produced should be jointly developed by the Region/District Director and Trainer and submitted to their appointing official. Sharing them among Region/District staffs and other regions and districts for the purposes of spreading information about successes and lessons learned is also a good idea.

Typically, workshop reports should contain information about: workshop dates and location; statistical information such as attendance and position/chapter/district breakouts; a narrative describing how the workshop was conducted and what was discussed (meeting minutes); financial information, expenses, receipts, etc.; general comments and recommendations; copies of workshop flyers and agendas produced; and, any other pertinent information that documents the event and helps plan for the future.

RECOGNITION - RECOGNITION - RECOGNITION

Certificates of Attendance or Completion are optional but encouraged. They provide a nice touch of recognition for workshop attendees. If used they should be signed by the responsible operations officer and/or the appropriate trainer as a minimum.

The GWRRA Home Office has a supply of certificates that can be acquired for this purpose. In addition, Leadership Training Pins are available, as are hanger bars for specific GWRRA Training Programs. Regions and Districts also have the option to use or develop their own original forms of recognition.