

Getting Organized: Developing Effective Training Institutes

Many U.S. federal agencies, offices, or programs offer training to staff or clients. This training may be sponsored by agency staff, but often is delivered by contractors—sometimes multiple contractors. Additionally, today's world of training embraces many different media, including classroom learning, Web casts, on-line training, satellite broadcasts, and conferences.

With so many formats and sources of training delivery, it is no wonder that many federal agency clients are confused about where and how to get information. One solution can be to create a training institute. A training institute serves as an umbrella to capture the various types of training being offered by a particular office. It offers a “one-stop shop” for clients to find out about training course content, delivery locations, and registration.

How does a training institute typically work? A federal agency or program office determines how it wants to reach its clients and either assigns staff or contracts with an entity to serve as the central organizer for the process. This staff or contractor then administers the institute in coordination with other agency staff or contractors.

Institutes are usually administered via the Web and are hosted on the agency's Web site, although they may have links to various contractor Web sites. To the client, the process is seamless, even though the actual training products may be delivered by varying agency offices or contractors. This, in turn, allows the client staff to make informed decisions about where, when, and how they want to obtain training.

ICF Consulting has helped a variety of clients develop training institutes, most notably the U.S. Department of



Housing and Urban Development's Community Planning and Development Training Institute and the Office of Native American Programs Training Institute.

For each of these, ICF Consulting developed an interactive training delivery information/registration Web site including a comprehensive image for the Web site as well as training materials. Developing dozens of training manuals and on-line training materials ranging from the basic to highly interactive, and delivering hundreds of training sessions

has garnered some best practices in the area.

Some of the key tips to developing a successful training institute include the following:

Develop a consistent look and feel. Before designing the Web site or writing the training manuals, decide what image will be conveyed throughout the training. Develop a graphic look that matches this image, and then carry this throughout all the products. The Web site and the cover of all training manuals reflect this image, regardless of which contractor developed the product. All classroom or Web-based learning products and any marketing materials or informational brochures carry the same theme.

Determine the information format needs. In some client communities, Internet access is lacking or slow (particularly in rural or low-income communities). The training institute information also may need to be shared via other mechanisms such as written newsletters or updates. Other clients may want to be able to contact the agency with questions, so ensure that the institute has an e-mail address and a telephone “hot line.”

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Establish a set of standard procedures. To ensure that products and deliveries are consistent across staff and contractors, develop a set of written procedures for accomplishing the training. Some questions to consider include the following: How often will a particular class be taught? Whose job is it to update the Web site with new information? Who will respond to voice mail or e-mail questions?

Ensure that all products meet accessibility requirements. All training materials and the Web site need to be accessible to persons with disabilities, including those with visual, auditory, or mobility challenges.

Develop a checklist to ensure that all meeting rooms are accessible under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and be sure that training materials are available in large print if needed. Also be sure to offer Telecommunications Display Device (TDD) access and to have a mechanism that allows clients to communicate should they need other adaptive formats.

For more information on ICF Consulting's training institute capabilities, please visit www.icfconsulting.com/training.