

## **Orienting and Training Volunteers**

All appropriate UNHCE staff should contribute their expertise to the orientation, education, and training of volunteers, whether or not they are actively involved in the delivery of that specific program. Experienced volunteers may also be included in the design and delivery of volunteer orientation and training, as appropriate.

**Orientation** of new volunteers is important so that they will feel comfortable with UNHCE, comfortable with their position as a volunteer, and prepared to begin a specified volunteer position or job. Volunteer orientation should be part of the first training session all volunteers receive, and should communicate the following broad messages:

- Familiarity with UNHCE
- What every volunteer should know (see Appendix)
- Specific expectations and responsibilities of their volunteer job

**Education and Training** is the process of preparing a volunteer to perform work for UNHCE or a specific program, including providing them with learning opportunities, background knowledge and skills needed to do a particular task. This may be as specific as how to measure water temperature for the Lakes Lay Monitoring Program, or as general as a basic understanding of New Hampshire's forest ecology for the Coverts Program.

### **The Role of Education and Training**

Appropriate education and training equips volunteers with the skills and knowledge required for their specific positions. As adult learners the following theory and principles of Malcolm Shepherd Knowles (1913 - 1997), a leader in adult education in the U.S., may serve as a guide for developing educational training and programming:

Knowles emphasizes that adults are self-directed and expect to take responsibility for decisions. Adult learning programs must accommodate this fundamental aspect:

1. Adults need to know why they need to learn something
2. Adults need to learn experientially
3. Adults approach learning as problem-solving, and
4. Adults learn best when the topic is of immediate value.

Knowles further lists these principles of adult education:

1. Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction.
2. Experience (including mistakes) provides the basis for learning activities.
3. Adults are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance to their job or personal life.
4. Adult learning is problem-centered rather than content-oriented.
5. In practical terms, instruction for adults needs to focus more on the process and less on the content being taught. Strategies such as case studies, role playing, simulations, and self-evaluation are most useful. Instructors adopt a role of

facilitator or resource rather than lecturer or grader. (Source: <http://tip.psychology.org/knowles.html>)

## **Initial Volunteer Training**

The following summary from Ch. 2 of “Achieving Success through Volunteers” (every county has a copy) describes different training methods which can be used to train volunteers in three areas:

- increasing their knowledge
- improving skills
- modifying their attitudes

Most UNHCE volunteer trainings employ a variety of these methods to achieve various outcomes. For example, Lakes Monitors need both the hands-on skills to sample lake water, as well as knowledge of lakes ecology and threats to NH lakes in order to communicate through outreach to other members of the public.

Completion of appropriate training is generally mandatory before a person becomes an official UNHCE volunteer.

## **Types of Education and Training**

### Increase Knowledge

A variety of training methods can help increase volunteer knowledge, and combining many methods helps increase the amount of information they retain. Also, consider that people learn in different ways, so mixing the methods will address the differing learning styles of your volunteers.

- Lecture (20% retained) – used when trying to provide a lot of knowledge in a short period of time. They can be boring, but they don’t need to be! They can also be exciting and informative.
- Reading (20% retained) – Best for conveying long or complex material, it is best used when combined with other methods, since so little (20%) is retained using only this method.
- Discussion (70% retained what they say themselves) – This is a slower method, requiring more time, but the information retention rate is very high.
- Field Trips (30% retained from observation) – Although observation can be logistically challenging, having volunteers watch or see others doing what you want the volunteers to do is better than having them hear or read about it. For example, showing people what habitats look like in the field is more memorable than reading or hearing about habitats.
- Videos, slide shows (combine hearing and seeing to retain 50%) – Using the previous example, combining hearing (lecture) with seeing (slides) has many advantages, with fewer logistical difficulties. Beware the difference between seeing a photo of a habitat

versus seeing a bulleted list (as in Power Point slides) describing the habitat. A picture is worth a thousand words!

- Individual Interviews/Volunteer Visit – Visiting a volunteer in their home to provide materials and/or perform an interview is a very effective way to really get to know a volunteer and their environment.

### Improve Skills

These methods are used after a volunteer understands (has gained knowledge of) the volunteer job. They must transfer the knowledge into practice or demonstrate that they can perform a skill in the correct or desired way.

- Demonstration – Volunteers can observe others performing a skill in the desired way, or can watch a video showing the same.
- Role-Playing – This method has the volunteer trying out the skill in a situation where mistakes do not matter, and where observers can comment (tactfully and helpfully) on the trainee's performance. Simulations, a similar method, is a designed experiment where the volunteer does the actual job, on a trial basis, with everyone behaving naturally (no artificial role-playing).
- On-the-Job Training – After a volunteer has acquired knowledge and demonstrated ability to do the volunteer job in a risk-free setting (i.e. role-playing, practice), they can start performing in their volunteer role, while being observed by trainers.

### Modify Attitudes

This is the hardest kind of education, but it can be used effectively to raise the consciousness (developing or strengthening an attitude that is already there) in your volunteers. For example, a volunteer who completed the Coverts training workshop stated in a workshop evaluation that the training completely altered her perspective about cutting trees; before the workshop, she assumed that all wildlife benefit from mature trees. But the training had taught her that many of New Hampshire's at-risk wildlife species depend on the young forests created through active management and cutting of trees. Therefore, her attitudes about forest management in general had shifted through exposure to the information presented at the Coverts training. This shift means that this volunteer will be better able to present a balanced portrait of wildlife habitat issues in her work as a Coverts volunteer.

- Role Reversal – If a volunteer is having trouble empathizing or working with another person, doing a role-playing exercise where they take the other person's role may help to understand what it is like to be in the other person's shoes.
- Self-Evaluation – This method, where volunteers might watch video of themselves doing their job or otherwise rank their values or skills, requires a high degree of trust. Otherwise, the self-evaluation will tend to tell you what the volunteers think you want to hear.
- Simulation – These exercises can help analyze one's attitudes and reactions. For example, have some individuals answer the phones at the Family Home and Garden Education Center and have others call in to the Center to get their questions answered. Discussing the interactions as a group helps everyone do a better job and understand what the callers might feel or want from the help line. Case Studies, when

well-written, can act like a simulation, and give volunteers an experience to analyze and react.

- Observations – Observing a situation or going on a field trip can give volunteers an opportunity to examine their own attitudes about the subject. For example, wildlife volunteers who have never seen what a clear-cut looks and feels like, may have their attitudes shift when they see, in the field, the second or third season re-growth providing dense habitat for wildlife (when the same cut looks barren and dead in a slide photo or a picture on television).

### **UNHCE Examples: Formats Used in Volunteer Educational Trainings**

Volunteer programs should vary teaching methods using a combination of techniques discussed earlier. Timing and format of UNHCE volunteer education and trainings vary according to program goals and history. The following are examples of some different formats used in existing UNHCE volunteer programs:

#### **Individual Visit (4-H Volunteer Orientation)**

4-H Youth Development educators have a detailed checklist of information to be covered in an orientation process. To best address the specific needs of a volunteer, this may be done as an individual visit. Certainly it would be more time-efficient to do this in a small group session, but that is not always practical and you do not want to delay orientation. (See Checklist for New [4-H] Leader Orientation at [http://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/Resource001038\\_Rep1194.doc](http://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/Resource001038_Rep1194.doc).)

#### **Group Hands-on Training During One to Two Day Workshops (Lakes Lay Monitoring Program)**

Typically an educator will meet on-site with a small group to assess the problems of concern for that particular lake and set up the initial monitoring plan. At the same time, “hands-on” on-water training is undertaken. These trainings are reinforced by one-on-one check-up site visits each year (also required for quality assurance purposes, as well as one or two day workshops each year or so. The workshops allow for interaction, sharing and networking among the larger collective group of state-wide volunteers and an opportunity to process the results of their local site into the big state picture.

#### **On-going Class (Community Tree Stewards and Master Gardeners Programs)**

The Community Tree Stewards Program and the Master Gardeners Program both use a similar format for initial volunteer training. Volunteers commit to attending 12 classes scheduled throughout a season, which include both indoor and outdoor components. An advantage of this format is that it requires that volunteers demonstrate a long-term commitment to the training, before they become active volunteers. This encourages dedicated volunteers.

#### **Overnight Workshop (NH Coverts Project)**

The NH Coverts Project offers a 3 ½ day overnight workshop as the initial training for Coverts volunteers. Disadvantages include high costs and inflexible timing (only offered 1/year). Advantages of this method are that it offers many opportunities for variable training

methods (lecture, hands-on, field trips, informal campfire discussions), it creates a strong bond among volunteers, and its obvious value (all meals and lodging are provided free) means volunteers feel strongly indebted to the program (ergo, more likely to reciprocate with volunteer time).

### **Continuing Education & Training**

Volunteers in UNH Cooperative Extension should be given the opportunity to improve their knowledge and skills during their time of service. Volunteers should be advised of Extension programs and in-service offerings, and of programs offered elsewhere that may be of interest to the volunteer for the purpose of program enhancement or self-development. Continuing education may be optional or mandatory, and is most important for long-term volunteers and volunteers who are performing complicated tasks (adapted from Ch. 2 of “Achieving Success Through Volunteers”).

This type of training is used to:

- Reinforce skills, knowledge and/or attitudes
- Introduce new skill, knowledge or attitudes
- Plan and manage program changes
- Provide volunteers with opportunities for self-renewal and growth
- Increase group rapport
- Help volunteers reach their maximum potential

### **Technology**

This will be the ever-changing section of volunteer orientation and training. Resources to support the current efforts are:

- YouTube web broadcast: <http://www.youtube.com> (type in UNH Cooperative Extension)
- eXtension: <http://www.extension.org>
- 4-H online training: <http://4h.wsu.edu/volntr/register.htm>