



BEST PRACTICES WORKBOOK

for Hunting and Shooting

Recruitment and Retention

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CHAPTER 10: Mentoring

Mentors provide an important mechanism for new participants to develop technical skills, as well as the social competence to become a long-term hunter or shooter. The concept of being socially competent may be new to some planners of Recruitment and Retention (R&R) programs. This is a fancy term for understanding and adopting the norms of behavior, etiquette, and belief system of hunters or shooters. These attitudes and beliefs, while often very subtle, are important to “fit in” with the group – to see yourself as a hunter or shooter (Coy, 1989). Having a guide or mentor to assist in this process makes “joining” much easier and less awkward.



Apprenticeship experiences provide opportunities for interested persons to become socialized into hunting and shooting (Decker et al., 1986). Through these experiences, the individual develops technical competence in a set of skills and techniques, and social competence through recognition and adoption of implicit qualities and beliefs that are associated with being a hunter.

Mentors play an important role in imparting both technical and social skills to students



who are in the continuation with support stage of the hunting/shooting adoption model (see Chapter 1 for description of the model). They

play an equally important role in guiding and encouraging learners to move out of that stage into the continuation without support stage, where they can form new relationships with other participants in that higher-level stage.

Most recruitment programs and events have largely focused on developing technical competence with little or no consideration for influencing social competence.

Technical competence is also a critical element of recruitment, but if a person with a high level of skill does not fit in with a group, he or she will not likely continue the activity.

The list below contains currently recognized Best Practices for mentoring new hunters and shooters. Following the list, each is explained. Worksheets throughout the chapter help you apply each practice to your own situation.

BEST PRACTICES FOR MENTORING

Effective programs:

- Recruit qualified mentors.
- Are community-based.
- Are sustained over time and provide multiple follow-up activities.
- Incorporate training/continuing education

as part of the instructor recruitment process.

- Evaluate mentors and have procedures for termination.
- Recognize and reward good mentors.
- Integrate their programs with other existing mentoring efforts.



BEST PRACTICE

Effective programs recruit qualified mentors.

Because of the extremely important role that mentors play, great care must be taken in their selection. Inter-personal skills, enthusiasm, and an overriding concern that their apprentice succeeds are critical elements to look for in mentors. Being a mentor is about transferring the technical and social skills plus the knowledge necessary to become a long-term hunter or shooter to another person. It is not about the mentor's skills or ego; it is about assisting the new participant in obtaining appropriate knowledge, skills and behaviors in a welcoming, supportive and nurturing environment.



It is important to note that having highly honed hunting or shooting skills is not a prerequisite for becoming a mentor. However, having the skills, knowledge and attitude to be able to transfer what hunting and shooting skills they may have to another person in an effective, positive manner is critical.

All potential mentors should undergo a background check and a psychological profile, if possible. Nothing can undermine recruitment or retention programs faster than having mentors who are there for the wrong reasons (see Chapter 4 for Best Practices on Selecting instructors and mentors).

Several existing mentoring programs exist (such as Big Brothers; Big Sisters and Boy Scouts of America) that can serve as models (or partners) in developing mentor programs.



BEST PRACTICE

Effective programs are community-based.

There are hunting and shooting R&R programs at work at the national level, state level and local level. By far the most effective place to effectively recruit and retain new hunters and shooters is the local community. This is where most people find activities and social support. Mentors who live and hunt and shoot in local areas can be effective guides to introduce newcomers into these activities.

Having mentors and activities focused in local areas also assists in ensuring that hunting and shooting sports are viewed as mainstream activities that anyone can participate in. Having these activities viewed as something exotic or that only happen in some distant location will greatly undermine R&R efforts. Local mentors who can relate well to newcomers make it “real” and attainable to them.

For example, if a person with potential interest in hunting or shooting attends a sport show or expo and hears a seminar on deer hunting by a nationally recognized expert or TV celebrity, his or her interest may be piqued and knowledge increased, but he or she may see hunting/shooting as something distant and exotic (much like the celebrity). On the other hand, if the newcomer has a local resident alongside to help interpret the new knowledge and provide real-world examples, the newcomer is much more likely to look upon the activity as something he or she could really do.

It is important to note that mentoring need not be one-on-one to be meaningful. Mentoring a parent and their children (or a small group of children) multiplies your efforts and provides the local social support for continuing the activity.



BEST PRACTICE

Effective programs are sustained over time and provide multiple follow-up activities that logically lead to the next stage of adoption.

Because recruiting a new hunter and shooter takes place over a long period of time and involves many steps; R&R efforts also must be sustained over a long period of time. (Hamilton, 1990).

Research has clearly demonstrated that one-time events do not make lifelong hunters or shooters, even when mentors are involved. To realize maximum return on your mentors' efforts, build a program that incorporates multiple contacts between the participants and the mentors for a sustained period. These include multiple skill development sessions that are coupled with multiple social support networking opportunities. These events need not be major events, but they do need to be supportive of the process. These may include a casual target shooting event, assisting in training a hunting dog or helping the landowner with some chores where you hunt.

Creating long-term contacts can be very difficult, because the number of potential new participants often far exceeds the number of available mentors. You must take care not to overwhelm your cadre of mentors. Providing mentors with clear direction and expectations ahead of time can avoid the pitfall. However, planning and implementing anything less than a multi-dimensional, multi-contact program will likely result in disappointment.

It is important to remember that the goal of the mentoring program is to transfer the technical and social skills plus the knowledge necessary to become a long-term hunter or shooter to another person. Therefore it is important to develop programs that logically lead to the subsequent stages in the adoption model.

Continually repeating activities within the same stage does not move students along the adoption model and may not create new hunters and shooters.

Understanding how hard this is requires thinking about the fact that there are people who do things and people who are things. Some people do things that may have taken several years of learning and practice – car mechanics, teachers or construction workers. However, these people may define themselves (outside of their work) as artists, collectors or... hunters. The ultimate success of any R&R effort is when someone moves along the adoption model until they define themselves as a hunter or shooter.



BEST PRACTICE

Effective programs incorporate training/continuing education as part of their mentor recruitment process.

Effective mentors can be an R&R program's most valuable asset. Because they play such a key role, they should be trained and re-trained over time. It is the program's obligation to ensure that its mentors can deliver the program as intended.

The training programs should have well thought-out objectives and provide the mentors with clear standards and expectations. In addition, the training provided should match the roles that the mentors will utilize. Providing opportunities for veteran mentors to share their experiences and to communicate about their successes and difficulties will often create a cadre of trainers you can rely on.

Effective mentors should be primarily concerned about transferring the technical and social skills, knowledge, and attitude necessary to becoming a long-term hunter or shooter to

another person, and assisting the new participant to obtain these skills in a welcoming, supportive and nurturing environment.

To achieve this, it is critical to understand the needs of the student or new participant. This understanding includes being aware of the student's current technical and social skill level, learning and physical difficulties, and personality. All of these elements, and more, must be considered in developing a personalized, student-centered mentoring.

Skillful mentors make sure that their students participate in meaningful, hands-on, fun activities that aid in their technical and social skill development. These activities should be driven by the needs of the student.

Program managers should provide mentor training and continuing education to show and model the behaviors and attitudes they want their mentors to exhibit to participants.

It is important to note that having highly honed hunting or shooting skills is not a prerequisite for becoming a mentor. However, having the skills, knowledge and attitude to be able to transfer what hunting and shooting skills they may have to another person in an effective, positive manner is critical.

The training required does not have to take place overnight or all at one time. Just as creating a new recruit does not happen with one exposure, training a new mentor also should take place over time. Training programs should include social support mechanisms for the mentors whenever possible (see Chapter 4 for more details on recruiting and training instructors).



BEST PRACTICE

Effective programs evaluate mentors and have procedures for termination.

Programs should not fear creating high standards. In fact, they cannot afford not to. Having high standards creates an esprit de corps that can enhance the pride of being part of a select group. It also ensures the best possible results for the program participants entrusted to the mentors.

However, the standards developed should be clear so mentors know what their expectations are. They also should be set in a manner that they can realistically be reached by most of the mentors that are recruited.



Don't assume that just because someone volunteers to become a mentor in your program that they are qualified to do so. Careful screening processes should be in place prior to recruiting mentors. The screening process should be rigorous enough to screen out inappropriate people but not so arduous that it scares potential good mentors off. This process should also be matched with the role that the mentor may be utilized. This process should be periodically evaluated to ensure its appropriateness.

Instructors and mentors also should be regularly evaluated against a set of carefully selected criteria. Any mentor that does not measure up to these requirements and expectations should be provided remedial training, allowed to co-mentor with a highly successful mentor, or if these efforts are unsuccessful, be terminated. Having specific, written procedures in place to terminate mentors is critical to avoid unpleasant situations, misunderstandings or legal action.



BEST PRACTICE

Effective programs recognize good mentors.

Don't overlook your mentors or take them for granted. Most mentors are not overly concerned with personal recognition, but everyone likes to know that their efforts are appreciated. Simple thank you letters, mementos, service awards, recognition dinners, stories about the program being published in newspapers, etc. are often all that it takes to keep them engaged

and energized about the program. Figure 6 contains an example of a volunteer incentive/award program.

INCENTIVE AWARDS

Instructors accumulate points based on their involvement in the Texas Hunter Education program. "Incentive Awards" are the agency's way of thanking volunteers, teachers and employees involved in hunter education. Points are accumulated based on the following:

FIGURE 6: Sample Volunteer Incentive Program

Students taught	1 point per student
Class points	10 points per course
Scheduled classes	5 points per course additional if scheduled prior to class conducted
Tenure	10 points per year 15 points per year for Master Instructors
Hours	1 additional point for 11 hours 2 for 12 hours; 3 for 13 4 for 14-15, 5 for 16-17 and 6 for 18+
Program orientation (includes standards of live fire, skills trial and home study)	50 points
Hunter Ed workshops and special events	25 points per workshop/event
Area Chief	20 tenure points per year 1 point per new instructor taught 25 points per workshop taught

Instructors receive training aids at early point levels. After continued involvement, instructors receive items they can use personally and/or as training aids in the program.

Instructors achieving the highest point level

(4500) are recognized in the Texas Hunter Education Hall of Fame and have their names added to the plaque located in the hallway of the education branch of the Texas Parks and Wildlife headquarters building.

25 (Students)	Training aid	1000	Fanny pack, bolo tie
50 (Students)	Training aid	1500	Gun case, hunter education print
100	Orange cap	2000	Custom engraved knife
200	Orange vest	2500	Handgun gift certificate
300	Gun cleaning kit	3000	Rifle gift certificate
500	Belt buckle, hearing & eye protection	3500	Shotgun gift certificate
750	Custom leather product (Bino-System), lapel pin	4500	Hall of Fame Award

Tenure Pins

Instructors receive hat/lapel pins recognizing their years of service in the Texas Hunter Education Program (upon attending first in-service workshop, and 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30 and 35 years of service).

RECOMMENDATION

Effective programs integrate with other existing mentoring efforts.

NOTE: This practice cannot truly be called a Best Practice, because it has not been tested and proven through careful evaluation. However, it does represent the best professional judgment of experts in the field of hunting and shooting R&R, and should be implemented with careful evaluation to validate effectiveness.

Developing a mentoring program from scratch can be very difficult and time consuming. However, there may be existing programs that have resources to assist.

For example, the Big Brothers and Big Sisters programs often assist with mentoring outdoor skills programs. These organizations already have volunteer training, screening and

evaluation programs in place. What they need (and often are looking for) is a new focus to recruit more volunteers into their program. Leveraging these and other similar programs can save tremendous effort and help you be more effective.

Boy Scouts of America, 4-H, YMCA and many conservation groups offer similar mentor development programs that may serve as models. Rather than reinventing new programs, we should look to expand participation in existing ones. Communicating the existence of these opportunities is the key to increasing participation.

Additional resources on mentoring can be found on the Web. One organization devoted to developing mentoring partnerships is Mentor (<http://www.mentoring.org>).

It is important to remember that not all mentoring organizations will be interested in partnering with the hunting and shooting sports. However, there are many mentoring organizations that should be given the opportunity to join your effort.