



USGS Continuous Learning Guidance Putting a Focus on Training and Broad Developmental Opportunities

Our employees have asked, “Are we putting enough focus on planning for the future and what is being done to develop employees for future success?” Employees want to know how they continue their development in the USGS, and supervisors are asking, “How do we invest in training and development (T&D) with limited resources?”

A US President once said, “For the bold new world of the 21st century, every adult American must be able to keep on learning for a lifetime.” So what does learning for a lifetime mean?

We know that new skills and knowledge are needed continually in our rapidly changing work environment. To keep pace and enhance career success and life experiences, we need to broaden our view of T&D to one of continuous learning. Continuous learning includes a wide variety of learning experiences, specifically defined a little later.

Alvin Toffler, author of “Future Shock” was quoted in 1991 as saying that “The illiterate will not be the individual who cannot read and write, but the one who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn”. So how do we take this philosophy and the concepts of a continuous learning environment and define a USGS philosophy?

We know that the USGS is committed to being a world leader in the natural sciences through scientific excellence and responsiveness to society’s needs. We also know that we are faced with an increasingly broad and complex spectrum of science issues under study, an integrated approach to studying and disseminating scientific information, a growing need for external communication and collaboration and the associated complex business structures necessary to support a workforce of close to 10,000 employees.

For our workforce to continuously acquire and sustain the necessary skills for science excellence, science leadership and science impact, we must foster a learning environment that:

- invests in the development of its people to ensure its world-class status;
- expects employees to take a personal responsibility for their own learning;
- expects managers and supervisor to support development of employees;
- understands that continuous learning is about embracing a variety of learning experiences;

- ensures that learning opportunities and experiences are aligned with the strategic direction of the USGS; and
- recognizes that leadership, supervisory and managerial skills are essential to maintaining a world-class organization.

What do high performing organizations invest in training and development to set a culture of continuous learning?

A recent poll of industry and government showed that high-performing organizations focused on the T&D of their employees and averaged 64 hours and \$1574/person. They invested, on average 3.2% of salary costs and provided T&D to almost 99% of employees annually. This was compared to the average for Government which invests an average of 22 hours and \$643/person (1.7% of salary) and trains, on average, 82.7% of employees. A 2% of salary is considered the general industry norm.

What is the goal for USGS investment in training and development?

We are remarkably fortunate to have some of the best experts in the world and access to excellent developmental opportunities at minimal cost through the USGS, our sister bureaus, DOI, and others. With that in mind, the goal is to provide appropriate learning experiences with an annual average goal of 40 hours of T&D for each permanent FTE. Because leadership, management and supervisory skills are critical to scientific performance, one-half, or 20 hours should be invested in these areas.

Forty hours of annual training, while not meeting the mark for the investment made by industry leaders, challenges us to step beyond the average for government and general industry benchmarks. Focusing on a commitment of time allows us to use the full breadth of learning opportunities, described next in this publication.

Winston Churchill once said, “Personally, I’m always ready to learn, although I do not always like being taught.” Continuous learning as we define it, might have changed his mind. So what is a “continuous learning” experience?

Continuous learning takes many forms and includes a full range of opportunities including formal classroom training: technology-enabled training (video, audio-tape, web-based, and CD-ROM); correspondence

courses; developmental assignments; mentoring; and on-the-job training, among other learning opportunities. It also includes conferences, workshops and details to other positions where these opportunities support T&D. These later opportunities are traditional ways that our research and development staff focus on continual learning.

Jack Welch, CEO of GE was quoted as saying, “We would not knowingly hire anyone in our company that wasn’t ‘boundaryless,’ that wasn’t open to an idea from anywhere, that wasn’t excited about a learning environment.”

Excitement about learning is an important trait for USGS employees, so in addition to the supervisors role of hiring employees who practice continuous learning, what other roles do supervisors, managers and employees have?

Supervisors and Managers:

If you are a manager or supervisor, you are responsible for planning for current and future skill needs by using a wide range of approaches to acquire, develop, and retain skills by:

- Reviewing your strategic plans and objectives and defining employees’ learning needs in relation to organizational goals, and by focusing on learning that addresses areas of performance weakness.
- Assessing skills using the OARS Skills Assessment Tool and define skill gaps.
- Setting priorities for training.
- Discussing your workforce and strategic plans with employees and helping them plan for their future through the use of individual development plans (IDP).
- Utilizing a variety of programs and opportunities to promote learning.
- Getting help from the Office of Employee Development (OED) in identifying sources for learning.
- Discussing with employees the expected results from each learning experience, and providing coaching and feedback.
- Annually investing a minimum of 40 hours of training per FTE, and invest equitably.
- Ensuring that the Training Management System (TMS) is used as the repository for all employees’ T&D records.

Employees:

A 1994 Harvard Business Review article on a Career-Resilient Workforce stated that if employees want career resilience they must be dedicated to the idea of continuous learning, stand ready to reinvent themselves to keep pace with change, and take responsibility for their own career management.

As an employee, you should take personal responsibility for your own learning by:

- Honestly assessing your skills strengths and gaps;
- Preparing an IDP, set goals for yourself and define the steps to meet your career goals.
- Seeking out T&D assignments.
- Reading books, magazines, and journals that address current issues and directions in your field so that you can focus on developing critical skills.
- Working with your supervisor to set your learning needs in relation to USGS goals.
- Put your T&D activities in TMS. Go to the OED website to learn why this is of value to you.

How is training and development tracked and reported?

TMS captures data on individual employee’s training records, and can provide aggregated reports on total hours, dollars, and types of training. These reports help supervisors and managers track their progress toward a 40-hour/FTE goal and see how they compare to external metrics for an investment of 2% of salary toward T&D. TMS captures data on traditional classroom courses, technology-enabled training (video, audio-tape, web-based, and CD-ROM), correspondence courses, conferences, workshops, and developmental assignments. Guidance on adding this information to the system is provided on the OED website - <http://training.usgs.gov>.

When do we plan for training and development?

Focus on T&D should be done as part of the yearly establishment of performance goals. Supervisors and employees should discuss the necessary skills for success during the next year of performance and new skills that should be developed to ensure success into the future. (Check out the OED website for a section dedicated to the development of IDPs.)

Supervisors and managers should consider and plan for T&D investments when they submit their annual budgets.

What if I need help in finding creative ways to train my staff?

Help is just a phone call or email away. The OED regional employee development liaisons can help find courses, develop solutions to support specific training or developmental needs, help with the procurement process for trainers, provide detailed reports on progress toward USGS goals, and help you with policy questions on training.

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