

National Transportation Training Directors Web Conference
Focus Group 1 Summary
February 6, 2008

Ann Gretter, NHI Training Program Manager, moderated a Web conference with training directors from a number of States by presenting a series of questions and providing each participant with an opportunity to provide feedback.

1. NHI wants to be sure that the training we develop fills the needs of the transportation community. Our main focus is technical training related to Safety, Operations, ITS, Freight, Asset Management, Pavements and Materials, Construction and Maintenance, Structures, Geotechnical and Hydraulics, Environment, Real Estate, and Planning. To better identify what your needs and the needs of our target audiences are we'd like to begin doing needs assessments.

Do you do needs assessments in your organization?

Most participants conduct needs assessments on an annual basis:

- *Yes, annually. We send surveys out to each district providing a list of NHI Courses.*
- *Yes, some. (Our approach is) informal and primarily focused on maintenance personnel.*
- *We do an informal assessment by contacting our engineering divisions and districts.*
- *Yes, we do needs assessments annually.*
- *We use an informal process. [We] solicit training needs information from the state engineer level and also receive informal input from individuals.*

Do these assessments work well?

Generally, the response was and has been that the annual calls for training are somewhat effective. However, since training budgets are limited, NHI Courses hosted tend to be the ones where the State can get at least 20 people into the course. Oftentimes, that means that non-infrastructure courses are short-shrifted.

How would you recommend NHI do needs assessments?

Comments included:

- *NHI could put a short description of the course and course development on the Web site for feedback.*
- *Adding NTTD to the course development notification list would give NHI another avenue to share information with State DOT engineering groups, because I would forward that information to the appropriate parties.*

Would weekly e-mails listing courses currently under development be useful? These e-mails would contain information on newly developed courses and/or courses that have been proposed?

Participants suggested using multiple communications channels:

- *Could you send the list of ‘under development’ courses quarterly?*
- *In addition to e-mail, providing a link to a Web page or an online survey would be helpful. This could be forwarded on to key colleagues.*
- *Catalog and Bluelines are helpful.*

2. I've been on site visits to several States over the past two years. While in those States, I've heard examples of how each plans training programs for the year. As an example, one State I visited does a three-year plan for their technical training supplemented by an annual call for training to their districts. Does a call for training direct your State's training program? If not, what directs your training program?

Participants' responses included:

- *Annual call.*
- *We have an annual call; however, approximately 80 percent of training is provided on an as needed basis. Typically we are more reactive to what the immediate training need is.*
- *One issue is staff turnover. Some staff may not be around when the training plan is being discussed.*
- *I ask our maintenance and risk management divisions for their training needs every year, but I have no idea how the engineering divisions select or provide training.*

Do you hear from professionals in the various technical disciplines about training they need? If so, how?

One participant said, “I don't hear from the technical groups, regarding training needs. Until we get a centralized training administration process, you should probably contact those divisions directly. But I'm fine with serving as a middle man between NHI and our State's engineering groups. It might help me build a relationship with them.

Would there be a good way for NHI to contact folks in the technical disciplines to better understand their needs?

- *It would be better to coordinate through NTTD and State contacts rather than having NHI link directly to field folks.*
- *Folks like the way we're working now — using the NHI Web site as a tool.*
- *Status quo is good.*
- *I like the new process of having FHWA enroll online, with notice provided to the State DOTs.*

3. NHI used to announce the courses that were under development to States. The benefit of this was that folks had an opportunity to provide input. On the downside, if a course was delayed for any number of reasons the announcements sometimes created a false expectation. Recently, NTTD and other State DOT representatives have asked NHI to once again post information about courses under development. What would work best for your organization to give feedback to NHI? How can NHI manage expectations around timeframes for new courses?

Participants suggested the following:

- *Provide a statement with a realistic timeframe attached.*
- *Consider sharing your process and average development timeframes with the recipients. Consider providing periodic status updates, too.*
- *I think a combination of e-mail updates and an online calendar would work well.*
- *Posting it would work best for us. Perhaps have a future timeframe to make it available in 2-3 years if the process isn't delayed.*

4. NHI currently relies on other FHWA program offices or Resource Center contacts to let us know who from the States could be involved in training developments. How can NHI connect with the expertise of the State DOTs when we're developing training and launching new courses?

Some participants engage their subject matter experts:

- *An e-mail would work. We could forward it to a subject matter expert for input. Those that participate have buy-in.*
- *I would be glad to forward requests for SMEs to the appropriate division.*
- *I think it would depend on the topic, but I think it would be a good opportunity for SMEs.*
- *Participating on development teams helps build buy-in, too.*
- *When getting SMEs involved we need to inform them of the best possible delivery mechanism.*

How can we more effectively get training into the hands of those who need it?

Responses included:

- *Bluelines?*
- *More flexibility with availability of instructors.*
- *Quicker turn around.*
- *When there is a high level of interest in a course, how can we schedule a second session and secure an instructor in a timely fashion?*
- *Video conferencing and Web-based training have worked well for us.*
- *We need to think about pod casting.*
- *[I] really like that NHI is using more distance learning formats.*

5. One NHI partner is the Transportation Curriculum Coordination Council (TCCC). This group identifies needs for training and partners with NHI and others to have training developed using a pooled fund. The group is identifying needs for new training based upon core curriculum and competencies for some technical areas. Are you familiar with TCCC?

All were familiar with TCCC:

- *I am aware of TCCC through NTTD conferences.*

- *I submitted an offer to share our courses with them, but never received a request from them.*
- *Yes, NYSDOT is familiar with TCCC.*

Are any of you TCCC members?

No one on the call is a TCCC member.

Do you think that doing needs assessments in partnership with TCCC is useful?

Participants' felt this is an excellent way.

6. What duration of training works best for your folks?

There were mixed reactions to Webinars:

- *We've had anywhere from 10 to 90 participants interested.*
- *Management prefers we provide overview courses that range from 4-8 hours in length. Shorter is preferred. But keep in mind this is operations-focused equipment courses.*
- *As I mentioned earlier, video conferencing and Web-based training have worked well.*

Is the use of self study via Web-based training working in your States?

- *We don't have the infrastructure to support wide-spread Web-based courses. (We don't have enough bandwidth.)*
- *A CD version would be helpful.*

Have you considered offering just-in-time information on the Web?

One person noted, "If they knew your Webpage would have just-in-time information in a concise format, I think people would be interested."

Would you be interested in seeing another delivery method, such as a correspondence course?

A participant expressed concern with this approach, "One issue with a correspondence course would be the amount of discipline needed to complete a course like this."

National Transportation Training Directors Web Conference
Focus Group 2 Summary
February 20, 2008

Ann Gretter, NHI Training Program Manager, moderated a Web conference with training directors from a number of States by presenting a series of questions and providing each participant with an opportunity to provide feedback.

1. NHI wants to shape its future business model so that we can continue to provide quality service to the transportation industry. One of the models under consideration is to have NHI get out of the training delivery business and focus solely on developing training content. What are your thoughts about the pros and cons of this? How might this impact the technical training in your States?

States represented felt that this would be a disservice. The change would increase the level of effort on the part of the State in terms of contracting and identification of qualified subject matter experts. States rely on NHI for those things. The States represented appreciate the skills and breadth of knowledge offered by NHI instructors.

States are also concerned that CEU availability would be impacted because NHI would not be delivering the trainings. One participant said that many States rely on NHI's delivery model for this and other reasons.

Another reason States rely on NHI's delivery method is the national perspective NHI brings to each topic. Hearing a national perspective along with local viewpoints adds depth to the material for many trainees.

The following two comments sum up reaction to this question:

- *We rely on your presenters. It (this proposed change) would impact us negatively.*
- *NHI has access to experts in the topics; it would be more difficult for individual States to tap into that.*

2. Another approach under consideration is changing NHI's delivery model to have States or hosts contract directly with pre-approved delivery vendors. The details of how this could work have not been determined. What do you see as the pros and cons of this option? What impacts would it have for your hosts?

Pros of changing the model:

- *[We] appreciate NHI's help, but often times having NHI as a 'middle man' slows down the process in dealing with vendors.*
- *I experienced a long delay in hearing back from NHI in regards to scheduling a course. This was inconvenient based on the end of the fiscal year timing. (There was agreement that NHI needs to implement certain process improvements.)*

Cons of changing the model:

- *We prefer to contract with NHI. [We] can contract directly with any government entity; however, we have to put out an RFP for large costs. So, this would delay the process quite a bit for us.*

3. Another model under consideration is having NHI develop training and then only provide Train the Trainer sessions, so that any organization could deliver training on their own or potentially our LTAP and Resource Center partners could deliver training. What do you see as the pros and cons of this model? How would it impact our hosts?

Cons of Train the Trainer model:

- *A number of participants agreed that staffing would be a problem. One added, We do not have a large enough staff for this. We would have to contract for a trainer. It would not be a savings for us.*
- *Certain States may have weak LTAP centers that would not be viable sources for training delivery. [Train the Trainer] would work for some programs where we have adequate in-house resources to deliver, but across the board it would be a problem.*
- *NHI staff/contractors are already pre-approved for certification credit. That's an advantage for having them continue to deliver training.*

Pros of Train the Trainer model:

- *It creates opportunities to include your own internal staff; this is often times well-received.*

To sum up the comments for this question, participants are looking for both delivery and development from NHI; not one or the other.

4. These new models are under consideration because NHI had long been stagnant in terms of growth. However, in the last two years we've increased our reach by 23 percent and this year we've already had double-digit growth. How do you feel about the current direction of NHI? Do you prefer the current business model over the alternatives proposed?

Comments included:

- *Because of our small staff, we do rely on NHI for traditional in-person training and video-conferencing. Web conferencing would also work well for us.*
- *NHI needs to respond more quickly to Host requests.*
- *We would like to increase use of video-training.*
- *NHI has made business changes that are very beneficial to us here in Texas. I prefer the current business model with some small changes such as the ability to interface directly with the instructors for scheduling.*

5. Are there any other models you would like us to consider moving forward?

Participants did not suggest other models; they did suggest ways to improve both delivery and development:

- *Add training that bridges the gap of management skills for technical folks (i.e. engineers).*
- *Web conferencing would also be helpful, as applicable.*
- *NHI can try offering TCCC basic training.*
- *I'd like to see some blended learning.*
- *Asynchronous Web-based Training, then with a synchronous event with an SME. (It is good to use blended trainings as refreshers before an Instructor-led Training.)*
- *I'd like to see a transportation or technical basics course for non-technical DOT staff.*

Ann Gretter noted that NHI is experimenting with blended learning and would appreciate any lessons learned you would like to share.