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Beginning with a strong foundation

Three key steps in providing successful training in the South

Dr Fran Deans (October 2013)

Summary

Running an effective training workshop requires a strong understanding of your topic and your audience. Understanding the skills (and skill gaps), needs and expectations are all vital if the training is to make an impact. While there is no 'one size fits all' template to running an effective workshop, we outline here some of the key considerations that have proven useful in a successful workshop — particularly in the South.

At INASP, we are regularly involved in the organisation of training workshops around the world — primarily in developing countries. As sustainability is a key focus of our work, we do this in partnership with local facilitators and institutions emphasising the development of local skills and capacity. The support we provide includes: the provision of training materials; financial support; the revision of existing training materials; and advising and aiding with fixed-term capacity building plans.

These training workshops are each unique in terms of context, participants, facilitators and subject matter. Despite these differences, each workshop aims to facilitate learning with the goal of change — in the knowledge, skills and behaviour of the trainees, with a resulting change to the institutions. However both INASP and our partners are aware that this happens to a varying degree; the impact of training events varies considerably and can be significantly context-related.

Three top tips

Our experience over the years in supporting training workshops on a variety of topics, for a wide range of people with vastly different needs has taught us some important lessons. Here, we outline some of the key steps that organisers and facilitators of training events can take to try to ensure that the outcomes of their training workshop are met. We also provide case studies that show these steps in practice.

These steps are:

1. Apply a rigorous selection process of participants
2. Provide pre- and post-training for participants
3. Align training objectives with the needs of the institution

1 Apply a rigorous selection process of participants

- Establish a standardised and approved process for identification of trainees to be circulated and adopted by all institutions wishing to participate in future training events

- Staff should only be sent to the training if they meet the participant profile and are in a position to follow-up post-training as outlined in the advance information

- Information about the training should be sent well in advance (three months in advance was decided as appropriate by one library consortium in the South) to allow for an accurate selection of participants

Select the right participants

INASP piloted a rigorous selection method of participants for the Learner-Centred Pedagogy Skills for Policy Influencers training workshop (Colombia, 2012). The selection process had two phases:

Phase One: Information was collected via a survey to find out the training participant candidates':

- Past experiences and future plans

- Knowledge and attitude towards Evidence-Informed Policy Making and information literacy skills, via a test

- Knowledge and awareness of learner centred pedagogical skills, via a problem solving exercise

Phase Two: The collected data was input into an excel file which was used as a selection tool:

- Different answers in the questionnaire were rated from 1-10 and then weighted according to the relevance given to different criteria

- Automatically, a ranking of best profiles, second choices and unsuitable participants was generated in by the tool (For more informaiton, see Antonio Capillo's blog on *Practising Development*: http://blog.inasp.info/state-art-me-iepractices/)

2 Provide pre- and post-training for participants

- Design training workshops with both pre- and post- workshop tasks for participants to complete. Ensure that such tasks are proportional to the training being provided and that they relate directly to the application of learning from the training in question

- Ensure that staff selected for training is aware of any post-workshop tasks and follow-up that is required and that support is provided to ensure such follow-up is completed appropriately.

- Advance preparation material, including details of post-workshop tasks (to help prepare participants and ensure they understand workshop follow-up requirements), to be sent to selected trainees at least one month in advance of the training.

Assess knowledge before and after training workshops

In addition to gathering feedback on participants' satisfaction at the Pedagogy Skills for Trainers of Policy Makers (Kenya, 2011) training workshop, the training course organisers (INASP and Institute of Development Studies (IDS)) collected data to assess the learning that took place during the workshop.

This was done via a pre-course and a post-course diagnostic test.The test results showed that there was a significant shift towards the established best practice following the training.

While these tests give insight into the knowledge acquired, they do not provide information on the extent to which the aim of the workshop — to change training behaviour — was met. To assess this, participants were observed during a session in which they conducted their own mini-training and selected participants were observed by the facilitators in the weeks following the workshop.

3 Align training objectives with the needs of the institution

- Conduct a training needs assessment of the involved institutions to identify common training needs

- Depending on the findings of the training needs assessment, a two tier approach to training (advanced and basic) should be adopted for future training; to ensure that training is available to all members but only training that they are in a position to benefit from

- Adopt a multi-year approach to training and skills development for members so that successive training activities build on each other.

Survey to identify training needs

Prior to an INASP/IDS organised Information Literacy training workshop (Zambia, 2010) a survey was conducted to establish the current status of information literacy programmes in the institutions of higher education, colleges and research that had been invited to take part in the workshop. This information aided the organisers in tailoring the training course to the needs of the participating institutions.

The two-tier approach

The Bangladesh library consortium identified the need for two levels of training for their e-resource management workshop for its members: Introductory for first-timers, and Advanced for those who had attended previous workshops.

The long-term approach

The Zimbabwe library consortium took a long-term approach to deliberately build on successive training workshops and roll these out in-country. An initial Training of Trainers Information Literacy workshop (South Africa, 2008) to which representatives of the consortium participated in was rolled-out the following year to 11 other members. Successive workshops have continued to build on former ones in this way.

Conclusion

As part of our work to improve and institutionalise training under our new, five-year flagship programme — Strengthening Research and Knowledge Systems (SRKS) — we are paying particular attention to consistently incorporating these tthree steps in into our training practice.

In March 2013, we conducted research into how the consortium of libraries in Uganda could ensure that the training events they organise are consistent in terms of quality of outcomes. These three steps were applied to our work with CUUL and the impact is to be followed over the first year.

INASP presented on this work at the 10th Northumbria International Conference on Performance Measurement in Libraries and Information Services in July 2013. The conference paper, 'Assessing the impact of workshops run by the Consortium of Ugandan University Libraries – measuring performance through effectiveness of training activities' is to be published in the conference proceedings.

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