



**Program Title: “Interagency Training Network Initiative”**

**State: North Carolina**

**Contact Person: Thomas H. Wright**

**Title: State Personnel Director**

**Agency: Office of State Personnel**

**Mailing Address: 1331 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-1331**

**Telephone (919) 807- 4800**

**Fax: (919) 715-9750**

**E-mail: [Thomas.Wright@ncmail.net](mailto:Thomas.Wright@ncmail.net)**

## **North Carolina State Government: Interagency Training Network Initiative**

With 90,000 employees in 100 counties, North Carolina struggles with the challenge of delivering quality training and performance improvement efforts to its workforce in timely, equitable ways. Prior to inception of this program, the training functions of the state's 30 agencies and 16 universities operated independently of each other, causing taxpayers to bear the burden of the inefficient use of resources associated with fragmented, redundant training opportunities and extensive duplication of effort. Trying to do so much with so little was taking a toll on individual trainers as well, resulting in burnout and the undesirable attrition of talented training staff.

To meet the multiple goals of building capacity among the trainers, creating a culture of sharing and mutual dependence across the agencies, reducing duplication of effort, retaining quality training staff and ultimately delivering more effective, efficient workforce development efforts, the NC State Personnel Director requested the creation of a networking program. Established in 2004 as a planned, strategic effort, the program linked existing smaller efforts at networking and has quickly grown to offer a broad span of activities, from the sharing training sessions, materials, and classroom space, to virtual meetings held so as to ensure inclusion of trainers in remote areas of the state, to challenging, meaningful trainer development opportunities.

The program has met its many goals and has demonstrated many successes, including the development of cost-cutting agency-shared training initiatives, elimination of duplicate work, and identification and mentoring of new, high-potential trainers. More importantly, it has also supported the provision of development opportunities to a broader span of our workforce and shown significant cost savings to taxpayers. Components of the program were recognized with a 2006 *Training Magazine* Editor's Pick Award and were featured at the Training 2006 International Conference and Expo.

### **1. Brief description of the program.**

The program has 8 interrelated components. *Trainer skill development* focuses on building capacity for agency training staff to develop and deliver effective performance improvement interventions. *Job-specific support* enables staff to more effectively deliver existing and mandated training as well as new, mission-critical programs, and seeks to buffer seasoned trainers from burnout and overwork. *New trainer support* speeds onboarding and increases engagement of new training staff. *Outreach* provides support to NC trainers scattered across the state's 550-mile span from mountains to coast. *Regional support* brings training and other trainers to locations nearer employee clusters. *External support* provides for ongoing communication about network activities with agency HR directors and others who oversee training. This includes the State Personnel Director, who sends personal thank-yous, copied to supervisors, to trainers providing exceptional levels of commitment and support to the network. *Shared information* includes newsletters, meetings, an annual conference, and a website with dozens of member-provided lesson plans and other materials. *Shared physical resources* include collaborative efforts in offering consolidated training sessions, bartering and swapping training topics and training skills, sharing agency-developed online training programs, and loans of classrooms and equipment.

**2. How long has this program been operational?** The program was launched in July, 2004.

### **3. Why was this program created?**

The program was created to build capacity within agencies to deliver quality performance improvement interventions to all employees regardless of work location, to promote collaboration and sharing of scarce resources, and to ease taxpayer burdens caused by inefficiencies and redundancy. Prior to formation of the network, workforce development efforts were often splintered, offering programs of inconsistent quality largely only to those state employees located in the state's urban areas.

#### **4. Why is the program a new and creative method?**

Many elements of the program are innovative. The multi-day, competency-based NC Certified Training Specialist (NCCTS) course not only develops skills but also provides for the growth of new talent, as promising graduates are recruited to serve as course faculty. The program is offered as a strategic, rather than the typical tactical, measure: graduates are prepared not only to deliver existing training but to conduct needs assessment and develop new, effective training interventions. New courses, formerly created and used in-house by single agencies, are quickly deployed statewide, as with the popular “Workplace Etiquette” program developed by a small agency. The award-winning “TrainerSmarts” program proactively targets seasoned trainers at risk of undesirable attrition and burnout. Arrangements for discounts with national conference sponsors and commercial vendors provide growth opportunities denied training staff in many state government settings. The use of virtual meeting technologies allows for involvement of training staff in remote locations while eliminating the costs and inefficiencies associated with travel to central meeting locations. Intentional efforts to include new staff provide for rapid onboarding and increases their engagement. Of special note is the new shared training session approach, which provides for efficient use of resources and timely delivery of training while reducing classroom and travel costs. In this state, the training network marks the first instance of agencies so freely sharing talent and resources. Finally, the involvement of the State Personnel Director himself is unique: his interest, given his relationship to the Office of the Governor, acknowledges the importance of trainers and their efforts, engenders a sense of professionalism among the trainers, and communicates the state’s commitment to workforce development.

#### **5. What were the program’s startup costs?**

Initial costs arose from the 1/5 salary and benefits required for part-time work on the program by network leader, an existing NC OSP trainer who volunteered to lead the initiative. Prorated costs for salary and benefits were approximately \$18,000.

**6. What are the program's operational costs?**

Due to the cost efficiencies realized by the sharing of resources, improved communication, and reduction in duplication of effort, the program has *negative* operational costs: that is, efforts now cost fewer tax dollars than they did before inception of the program.

**7. How is the program funded?**

This program has had no formal funding as it is an expansion and redesign of existing services.

**8. Did this program originate in your state? Yes.**

**9. Are you aware of similar programs in other states?**

While a few other states offer opportunities for trainers to gather and talk, no other state, as far as we know, has created a planned, multifaceted, managed program, nor launched one as a strategic, systems-oriented initiative.

**10. How do you measure the success of this program?**

The program has demonstrated success across all of its eight components. The demanding NCCTS course has proven so popular that it is a challenge just to meet demand: the course has never had an empty seat or dropout. Several agencies now state certification as a hiring preference and use the course competencies in the trainer recruitment process. Feedback from graduates and managers consistently provide testimonials of enhanced performance and positive impact on agency training efforts. One graduate directly correlates her recent promotion to her enhanced performance subsequent to attending the NCCTS course. A small agency, enabled by training provided to network members, is launching a new part-online curriculum that will save

taxpayers the costs associated with 560 person-days of training this calendar year alone. The “TrainerSmarts” program, developed in part to address concerns about burnout and undesirable attrition among the state’s seasoned trainers, received a 2006 *Training Magazine* Editor’s Pick Award and was featured at the international 2006 Training Solutions Conference. Also, where once a remarkable event, it is now no longer unusual to see agencies routinely sharing training sessions and seats in classes. This simultaneously ends the problem of empty seats in training while providing employees access to professional development opportunities in a timely way. The sharing approach typically results in cost savings some two-thirds of those associated with offering separate, redundant events as was the tradition in the past.

Perhaps the most important evidence of success, however, is the shift of the network from leader-led to member-led. The leader, once heavily involved in urging sharing and collaboration, has become less a driver and more a coordinator, helping members make connections and relaying information as needed. The network has taken on momentum and is now operating with an energy that promises to be self-sustaining in the future.

#### **11. How has the program grown or changed since its inception?**

The network has grown to include an array of entities, including large and small agencies, county government, and Universities. The website has expanded to a robust resource with dozens of lesson plans and accompanying materials, links to varied training resources, a database of classroom availability, and a shared calendar. Most significant is the growth of the shared training efforts that have greatly reduced the burden on taxpayers while easing the workloads of those involved. The shift of the program from to a self-sustaining entity further increases efficiencies and supports the hope that the program will have a long, successful life.