

IDRC SUPPORT OF TRAINING

by Olga Lendvay

Since most of IDRC's agricultural information projects - which you represent here - have training components, we thought this meeting would provide a good opportunity to discuss matters related to training of projects' staff.

Training has been provided for projects in order to build-up the capacity of their staff for handling information activities in the areas proposed by projects.

It is important that during the planning stage of a project the training which will be needed is clearly identified (level, specialty, duration, an idea where it should take place, etc.) and is adequately budgeted for. Because the training will take place during the life of the project and all expenses will be covered by the funds provided for the project, we call this category "in-project training" or "training within project".

Assistance for training in information sciences has also been provided by IDRC through its Fellowships and Awards Division (FAD) in cases when there has been a strong possibility that the Information Sciences Division in the future will have a project at a given institution and qualified personnel will be needed to start and develop information activities. This category is called "pre-project training".

Still another category is available with FAD's financial support, which is called "post-project training" and is used when, after completion of a project, there is still a need to improve the knowledge and upgrade qualifications of the staff in order to ensure continuity and good performance of the activities developed by the project.

Besides pre- and post-project training, on the recommendation of the Information Sciences Division, FAD will occasionally agree to support training for someone who is not part of a future or past project but who is an information staff member at an institution which relates to the programs of the Information Sciences Division of IDRC. This category is called "program-related" training.

Proposals for training support by FAD in the three above-mentioned categories have to be well justified and recommended by the Information Sciences Division, which is competing with other IDRC divisions for the limited funds available at FAD for support of training.

Types of Training

The types of training supported by IDRC vary according to the needs of particular projects and can be:

1. Short training

- (a) in-service training
- (b) short specialized or general courses
- (c) study tours

2. Full-time academic training

1. Short training

- (a) In-service training has been the type of training used most frequently for projects. Well-run libraries and documentation centres, mostly in developing countries, have been used to provide instruction in specific subject matters or on general functions and administration. More recently, some institutions have been making efforts to provide guided and supervised training tailored to the needs of trainees.
- (b) Short courses are offered sometimes by international or national organizations, or in cooperation between the two. They may be on a narrow, specialized subject, e.g. thesaurus development, or on a comprehensive subject, e.g. management of information centres. Both types of training have been supported by IDRC for projects that needed the subject expertise.
- (c) Study tours have been supported occasionally for projects' staff who already have a sound theoretical and practical background in information sciences and need to enlarge their horizon by observing operations in other documentation/information centres and to establish contacts with their staff.

2. Academic training

Most of the academic training has been supported at the Master's level. Studies at the Ph.D. level have been supported only in special cases, mainly when there has been a need to develop teaching staff for university postgraduate programs in information sciences which are being assisted by IS/IDRC in their establishment.

Master's level usually requires 36 credit hours and in many universities can be completed in one year if the candidate fulfills all requirements. Master's level with a field specialization (agricultural information) requires more credit hours (usually 39), in which case the course is extended beyond one year.

Presenting application for admission is the candidate's responsibility. We may help him/her to identify an appropriate university and, on his/her behalf, request information on the program and an application for admission. Both are forwarded to him/her and from that point on he/she corresponds with the university on his/her admission.

Processing of an award by FAD also requires time for receiving all necessary documentation from the trainee and from the training institution and for dealing with formalities. When all documentation, and especially proof of admission from the university, are received, it will take FAD at least two months to complete formalities for an award.

Handling of Training

The whole procedure of sending people from projects for training involves several persons at different stages and is usually done in the following steps:

- (a) Definition of training needs according to what needs to be accomplished in projects.
- (b) Identification and selection of candidate.
- (c) Definition of training program and suggestion of dates of training.
- (d) Inquiries with institutions on acceptance of candidates, proposed training program, suitability of suggested training dates, fees, etc.
- (e) Changes and adjustments if proposed elements have not been accepted by training institutions.
- (f) Trip scheduling, administrative arrangements.
- (g) Requesting trainee and training institution to provide brief report on the activity.

All the above-mentioned steps require time and effective communications between the people involved. According to past experiences, at least three months are needed to deal with points (c) through (f), especially in cases of study tours. In most instances this is not realized by Project Leaders, who sometimes insist that the training should start the next week or month. It would help if, during the early conversations about specific training, Project Leaders would consider the time requirements, and also the geographical preferences of location of training (as outlined in the IS training policy) and would provide their ideas about the institutions in which the training could take place.

As far as release of funds for training is concerned, if the training is administered by the project, it is the responsibility the project to take care of bookings and air tickets and to pay the trainee a per diem advance before he/she embarks on the trip.

If the training is Centre (IDRC)-administered, it means that the funds are in Ottawa and have to be released to cover all expenses related to the training. In that case, our Travel Office usually takes care of the bookings and sends a prepaid ticket to an airline office at the location of the trainee, who simply picks it up.

Before starting the trip, the trainee is also entitled to receive a per diem advance. As a rule, this should be deposited in his/her account in a bank at his/her location. The transfer of money has to be done from Ottawa ahead of time.

A problem arises when the trainee's bank cannot accept hard currency. In that case, we have to be informed well in advance where the money should be deposited so that it will be available to the trainee before the start of the trip. In some cases, when the banks in the country of the trainee do not handle hard currencies, we have to ask institutions in other countries, which will provide the training, whether we could deposit the trainee's per diem advance at their bank. If they agree, they pay the per diem advance to the trainee upon his/her arrival. This arrangement can be time-consuming and therefore it is important that we receive the banking information well ahead of time.

Arrangements for some approved training can be done directly with training institutions by the Project Leader, by the appropriate IDRC Regional Office, or by cooperation between the two. This is usually done when the trainee's and the training institutions are geographically close. In that case, copies of the correspondence related to the training and a report on the training experience should be sent to the Training Coordinator in Ottawa.

All institutions accepting trainees require their curriculum vitae. This should be sent to them directly (with a copy to the Training Coordinator) by projects when approaching those institutions with an inquiry about providing training. If the training is being arranged from Ottawa, the curriculum vitae should be sent to the Training Coordinator.

Training institutions also need to know what subject areas are of interest to the trainee in order to enable them to prepare a suitable training program. Projects should comply with the requirement by specifying clearly the information areas in which training should take place.

Location of Training

The Information Sciences Division policy on training, which is similar to policies of other IDRC divisions, specifies preferences of geographical locations in which IDRC-supported training should take place. In order of preference, the training should be carried out:

- (a) In the country of the candidate.
- (b) In the region of the candidate (if not available in his/her country).
- (c) In other developing regions (if not available in the region of the candidate).
- (d) in Canada.
- (e) in other industrialized countries (if not available in Canada).

This requirement has to be considered seriously by projects and Divisional program staff when planning training for projects. In many cases, beneficial training can be provided in the region, in an environment similar of the trainee's home environment where he or she may have more chance to learn about common problems and ways of solving them.

Comment

Handling of training is a complex activity which requires good communications and rapid action by all concerned in dealing with formalities and deadlines imposed by institutions.

As information on training, especially short training opportunities in the regions is not readily available to staff in Ottawa, we would appreciate your cooperation in letting us know about planned training which comes to your attention.

International Development Research Centre

MANUSCRIPT REPORT

Agricultural Information: Experiences and Emerging Issues

**Record of a One-Day Meeting of
IDRC-Supported Projects held in
Ottawa, Canada, 7 June 1985**

October 1985



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Record of a One-Day Meeting
of IDRC-Supported Projects
held in Ottawa, Canada
7 June 1985

Edited by K.P. Broadbent

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