

Collaborative Contracting Training Northern Training Pilot Results March 2016

Background

The purpose of the Collaborative Contracting Training pilot was to implement effective and relevant MCFD-specific procurement and contract management training to ministry staff and service providers in the northern part of the province. The training was designed to strengthen and standardize procurement and contract management practices and address specific challenges and needs (i.e., seasonal weather conditions, prohibitive travel costs, and staff turnover) associated with the North.

Training

Each training session required 1.5 days. The topics covered Core Policy, key contract practices from the MCFD *Contract Management Manual*, and the steps in the Procurement and Contract Lifecycle. The session also covered the contracting framework, including interprovincial and international trade agreements that govern contracting. The content was customized for a joint audience of staff from the ministry and the contracted social services sector, and was delivered using specific social service examples. This training provided procurement and contract management knowledge and skill-based needs for the participants.

The pilot was delivered in two phases:

- Phase 1 was delivered to ministry staff in January and February 2015 in Prince George and Fort St. John, and provided foundational training on procurement and contract management (Procurement and Contract Management Program training courses 201, 202 and 203).
- Phase 2 delivered training to MCFD staff, as well as contracted service providers from Terrace, Fort St. John and Prince George, and covered all phases of the contracting lifecycle – from planning to post-contract evaluation.

Evaluation of Training

Expectations ranged from enhancing relationships to improved contract knowledge. Surveys conducted after each session showed improvement in self-assessments, indicating improved self-confidence and a greater understanding of contracting policy and requirements. Further, overall positive feedback from trainees indicated that expectations were met.

A total of 126 participants attended the training, and their knowledge and competency was measured before and after the training.

The pre-training survey feedback revealed that 90% of participants reported they have *some experience with contracts* and *understand contracts well*. Nine percent of the participants described themselves as *not understanding contracts at all*. Regarding the level of confidence in managing contracts, 68% of the respondents reported they were *confident* and *very confident in managing contracts* versus 32% who stated they were *somewhat confident in managing contracts*.

Participants highlighted a multitude of learning expectations in the pre-training survey. A sampling of the key expectations and themes included a better understanding of:

- *Basics of contract management;*
- *Contracting process, including contract-related day-to-day tasks;*
- *How to develop and support good working relationships with funding managers;*
- *Standards and reporting requirements, including both qualitative and quantitative measures;*
- *Requests for Qualifications and Requests for Proposals (RFQ/RFP) processes;*
- *Updates to the templates;*
- *Negotiating contracts;*
- *Monitoring compliance, including service delivery and measureable outcomes;*
- *The impact of planning on future contract opportunities;*
- *Effective measurement tools in negotiation opportunities; and*
- *The overall flow of contracts and how to better support contractors.*

The post-training surveys revealed that approximately 87% of participants identified feeling *more confident in contract management processes and understanding solicitations*.

Content and materials were refined in an iterative process, by implementing participant responses throughout the training. More than 84% of participants identified the training as *relevant and engaging* with real-life applicability. However, due to the participants' varied experience levels, a minority of attendees did not find the content applicable to their roles. Table 1 details the survey results.

Table 1. Post Training Survey Summary

Survey questions		Types of responses		
		Strongly Agree/ Agree	Neutral/Disagree/ Strongly Disagree	Total
1	The purpose of this course was clear.	71.4 %(40)	28.6 (16)	100(56)
2	The course was relevant to my work/career.	83.9% (47)	16.1% (9)	100(56)
3	The activities contributed to my learning.	82.5% (47)	17.5% (10)	100(57)
4	The course material was useful.	83.9% (47)	16.1% (9)	100(56)
5	The pacing of the topics was appropriate.	84.2% (48)	15.8% (9)	100(57)
6	The course content flowed in a logical sequence which the learner could follow.	91.2% (52)	8.8% (5)	100(57)
7	The facilitator encouraged participation and feedback.	98.2% (55)	1.8% (1)	100(56)
8	The facilitator was able to effectively communicate the subject matter to the learner.	98.2% (56)	1.8% (1)	100(57)
9	The facilitator used relevant examples to explain concepts.	94.7% (54)	5.3% (3)	100(57)

Cost Savings Resulting from the Pilot Format

Given that the training was delivered within the North, the regular costs of \$1,000 per participant were reduced to \$200 per participant. With 126 participants attending, the cost to attend the sessions was reduced from \$126,000 to approximately \$28,000 – a savings of \$98,000.

Savings of 50% were also experienced with respect to people's time commitment, which was reduced from 3 to 1.5 working days.

Challenges

There were a number of challenges identified in delivering the training, which included: seasonal weather conditions, long-distance travel, limited flight or alternative travel options, and the time required to attend the training.

High staff turnover and extended position vacancies put additional strain on existing staff who could have benefited from the training and were unable to attend due to existing workloads and limited coverage. Additionally, ministry and agency offices have budgetary constraints that became a barrier for some agency staff in remote communities to attend the training.

Next Steps and Opportunities

Although the pilot training sessions were targeted to MCFD's northern geographic area, accessing high quality training is challenging throughout the Province. While interest is high in remote areas of the province, we also had attendance from an agency based out of Vancouver. The training took a unique approach for the ministry and our contracted service provider staff who are involved in procurement. The results of the pilot demonstrated that the training can be delivered effectively to persons with varied skills, knowledge and competencies.

Future opportunities for this training include:

- A video recording of the training was completed, which presents an opportunity to broaden the scope of the training across the province.
- The training can be refined to reflect local area issues and be reduced to one day with enhanced video training webinars for staff who are unable to attend in person.
- Using a similar model, travel costs can be reduced by providing the training in regional centres. This model is currently being implemented in the Interior.
- The ministry workshop and Project and Contract Management Program courses can be continually updated to reflect current issues, and local experience.
- Survey follow-up with attendees six months past the training would be beneficial.
- An information-sharing channel can be maintained in order to enhance the training options. For example, a Community of Practice group consisting of both ministry and service provider staff could provide a regular forum to discuss ongoing issues common to the group.