SELECTING TRAINING STATIONS

Enlisting the proper training station is integral to the success of programs participating in the cooperative method of instruction. Several criteria for consideration encompass all program areas, and can be helpful in narrowing the selection process. In particular, the following three questions address dimensions which can aid the coordinator in the decision process.

- What constitutes an acceptable training station?
- Where and how do I start looking for potential cooperative employers?
- How do I overcome employer resistance to the cooperative method of instruction?

This monograph outlines strategies for answering the above questions.

Standards for Acceptable Training Stations

The determination of what constitutes an acceptable training station is critical to providing relevant experiences for each student’s career objective. To do this, the coordinator should have a set of standards to aid in the identification of acceptable training stations. Consideration should be given to five critical areas in developing these standards.

- **The employer is a trainer and a teacher.**
  Training station sponsors should be capable and willing to provide occupational training and educational opportunities within the student’s career choice.

  The coordinator must explain the objectives and goals of cooperative education programs. The coordinator can determine whether a standard of cooperative training is in evidence by the willingness of the organization to develop jointly with the coordinator a step-by-step training plan, to assign an experienced worker to supervise the student-learner, and to arrange time to confer periodically with the coordinator. Scheduled conferences between the training sponsor and the coordinator are critical to the success of the program. Using these conferences, the coordinator monitors the development, updating, and evaluation of the training plan.

  Another means of determining whether this standard is being met is to examine the procedures the organization follows in training its full-time personnel. Does it provide systematic training for these employees? Is participation in adult education encouraged? Are personnel involved in developmental skills improvement courses for employees?

- **The training stations should provide experiences in the occupational area related to the student’s career objective.**
  The student-learner’s assignment must be one that falls within the occupational area, and it must be related to the student-learner’s previously
identified career objective. The training sponsor must express a willingness to provide a variety of learning experiences within the student learner’s capabilities.

One stumbling block in choosing an acceptable training station is the coordinator’s desire to find jobs for students as quickly as possible. **Resist the temptation to accept a training station that does not specify the tasks to be performed by the student learner.** Every effort must be made to select training stations that will provide accounting experiences for accounting students, agricultural experiences for students in agriculture, etc. Since cooperative education experience is long-term, work experiences must be of sufficient variety and complexity to challenge the student-learner and provide a positive and realistic image of the occupation.

- **The organization should exemplify high ethical standards.**
  Care must be taken to determine whether the organization is one that exemplifies high ethical standards in relations with customers, clients, and employees. The student-learners for whom coordinators are responsible are at an impressionable age, and they are especially prone to imitate adults. They are highly idealistic, and these ideals and values are rigidly structured as to their expectations of adult behavior. Coordinators are encouraged to avoid placing students in situations where they may be compromised by instances of poor ethical practices.

- **The training station should be accessible.**
  Unless there is adequate public transportation or the student-learner has private transportation, a training station that is excellent in all other aspects might not be adequate because of the inability of the student to get to the job. Consideration also must be given to the amount of time needed to get from the school to the training station. Use of a school bus could be requested to transport all cooperative students leaving at midday to a central location from which they might use public transportation.

- **The training station should provide a safe environment.**
  Buildings, equipment, and grounds should meet local and state safety regulations. A coordinator should alert student workers to potentially dangerous situations. Training stations that are located in potentially dangerous locations or stations that require odd hours may not provide a safe environment. “Liability of Teacher/Coordinators in Cooperative Education” may serve as a source of information regarding legal responsibilities of the teacher-coordinator. This research paper is available upon request from Anne Rowe at the Virginia Department of Education.

- **The employer must be in compliance with all labor laws.**
  The training station must comply with local, state, and federal labor regulations related to minors. Information is available from the United States Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division, and the Virginia Department of Labor and Industry, Division of Labor Law Administration. Although the
coordinator’s function is not to enforce these laws, the coordinator should alert the training station of the existence of such, regulations and expect compliance.

Laws regulating wages, the issuance of student-learner certificates, the employment of minors in hazardous occupations, and situations requiring work permits are primary areas of concern.

The minimum wage and overtime standards apply to student-learners who are employed by employers subject to the regulations. Since this law is complex, the coordinator should suggest to the training sponsor that contact be made with the regional Wage and Hours Division Office in order to ascertain whether the organization is subject to the regulations. The employing organization must obtain approval from the United States Department of Labor to be exempted from paying the minimum wage.

- The coordinator must insure the training stations meet appropriate.

**The training sponsor:**

1. understands and shows an interest in the cooperative method of instruction.
2. is interested in providing instruction within the framework of part-time employment.
3. is willing to provide a wide variety of learning experiences compatible with individual needs and capabilities.
4. is willing to confer periodically with the coordinator.
5. is willing to develop jointly with the coordinator a step-by-step training plan.
6. works closely with the student-learner and the coordinator.
7. makes instructional materials available to the student-learner and the coordinator.
8. provides employment that meets or relates to the career objective of the student-learner.
9. employs the student-learner for at least an average of 15 hours per week.
10. serves as or designates a training sponsor to supervise and direct the student-learner on the job.
11. discusses career possibilities with the student-learner.
12. provides a physical and moral environment that is safe and beneficial for the student-learner.
13. establishes a working schedule for the student-learner that is in agreement with local and state program guidelines.
14. has equipment and facilities that are up to date, safe, and in good working condition.
15. provides employment for the student-learner that is accessible in terms of location and transportation facilities.
16. enjoys a good reputation in the community in the areas of social consciousness, ethical conduct, and labor relations.
17. pays wages comparable to those of similar businesses; at least minimum wage unless station meets sub-minimum wage criteria.

Many coordinators use a checklist to record their impressions of potential training stations. Remember that such a document may reflect a subjective interpretation of training stations; it should therefore be considered “confidential” and handled with care.

**Locating Training Stations**

After the coordinator knows the kinds of training stations needed, a plan must be devised to search systematically for these stations. Coordinators should consider the following methods to locate potential training stations.

- **Develop promotional materials.**
  Vocational program areas in the Virginia Department of Education offering the cooperative method of instruction have available attractive materials to use with organizations that are surveyed. Locally prepared material may be more appealing. The time, effort, and money spent in preparing colorful and attractive promotional materials is returned in useful dividends such as pride in the school, positive reminders, and enforcement of sales techniques.

  Administrative approval of a news release coinciding with the time of the mailing of the survey form should be secured. The news release will explain the cooperative method of instruction and publicize the impending survey. It is important that the release be timed effectively. See the “Promoting Cooperative Education” section for more information on program promotion.

- **Develop survey instruments.**
  The cover letter should explain the purpose of the survey and include a request for a follow up appointment. Refer to the “Determining the Need for a Cooperative Education Program” section for an example of a cover letter and survey form which can easily be adapted to help find potential training stations for cooperative programs.

- **Develop a list of employers to be surveyed.**
  Preparation of a list of employers to be surveyed is the next step. Although the classified section of the telephone directory can be used to compile the list, other sources are available.

  Contact the local Chamber of Commerce or a personnel association to explain the need for the proposed survey. Discuss the survey instrument and assure that the information obtained will be kept strictly confidential. Request a membership list. The list should provide names of those persons in authority, those who determine the employment needs, and the training capabilities of companies.
Other names, addresses, and contact personnel might be secured from your local Advisory Committee, the Retail Merchants Association, the Virginia Employment Commission, Government Manpower Agency, and Planning District Commission.

Do not overlook small businesses. They may offer more of a variety of experiences than larger businesses. Do not rely strictly on prestigious, nice looking businesses. The training experience offered, not the appearance, is the most important factor in choosing a training station. Do not place a large number of students at one training station. Students react to the training situation more realistically and responsibly on their own rather than in groups.

- **Survey businesses.**

  Plan a visitation schedule that will allow sufficient time to conduct the survey and explain the cooperative method of instruction. In selecting the employers to be interviewed on a particular day, group them according to geographical location. Remember that you, the energetic and informative coordinator, will sell the program. Afterwards, the quality of a successful program will sell itself.

  Selling a product begins with a thorough knowledge of the product to be sold; selling the cooperative method of instruction is no exception. The primary purpose for the initial interview is to secure information about employment possibilities; however, an explanation must be made of the cooperative method of instruction to establish the purpose for conducting the survey. First impressions are critical. An employer respects the teacher-coordinator who approaches a task in a professional manner.

  Briefly describe the program to the potential employer. If the survey form previously mailed has not been completed or cannot be found, supply another and proceed with the questions. Should the form be completed, review portions, and if needed, utilize additional time to explain the cooperative method.

  Any questioning should be in a personal tone to show the school’s interest in that particular business. Be sensitive to the employer’s reactions and supply information as requested, but save any hard-sell techniques for the follow-up interview.

  Occasionally, the employer will invite you to tour the facility because the company is also trying to promote a positive public image. Take advantage of the opportunity. Note the tasks performed, equipment being used, the attitudes displayed by the employees, and the flow of work. If the opportunity does not present itself, request a tour for another time.

  The coordinator should take the initiative in terminating the interview after a reasonable time (15 to 20 minutes). Do not leave, however, without assuring
that you will call for a subsequent appointment to explore the possibilities of the participation of the organization in the cooperative method of instruction.

- **Analyze results.**
  To maximize the use of the completed survey, a file should be maintained. Results should be analyzed, interpreted, and summarized as to classifications of organizations, employment needs, and attitudes towards the cooperative program. Additional information should be recorded after follow-up visits. Because conducting occupational surveys is a continuous process for the teacher-coordinator, an up-to-date file is a constant source of information. A summary of the results also should be made available to the administration, local advisory committee members, and local news media --without using company names, of course.

- **Follow up all contacts.**
  After the survey results have been studied and a determination made of likely training station prospects, a systematic visitation plan must be formulated so that follow-up appointments may be arranged. Advantages of the cooperative method of instruction to be stressed during follow-up appointments are enumerated below.

**Students will:**
1. be provided supervised training on the job in the specific occupational area that they have chosen as a career objective.
2. have an opportunity to learn skills under actual working conditions.
3. receive relevant instruction and be able to experience the world of work.
4. encounter daily situations in an adult environment that will help them make mature decisions regarding full-time employment.
5. be able to make a gradual transition from school to work.
6. receive compensation for their work, build self-esteem, and contribute to their economic independence.

**The organization:**
1. becomes an active partner in the public education of its community.
2. helps to revise curriculum to reflect employment requirements.
3. has a chance for a trial acquaintance with students before full-time employment.
4. will be developing future employees over an extended period without creating employee tenure.
5. will receive a student-learner who already possesses some of the skills necessary to be a productive worker.
6. will be provided with a coordinator from the school who will serve as a consultant for training needs.

The systematic search for adequate training stations must include planning, conducting a community survey, approval and support of school administrators and local advisory councils, and publicity. Further, the actual selling of the cooperative method of instruction must be accomplished by personal visits to those in authority at prospective employer organizations. Careful interpretation and storage of data
must be made for optimum use of the survey results. Finally, successful selling of any product or service depends on an enthusiastic, informative, and intelligent sales person.

**Overcoming Resistance**

The coordinator must be skilled in techniques of effective oral communication. Communication involves the exchange of meaning between individuals through a common system. One communicates in words and gestures. The following techniques will be helpful to the coordinator in communicating effectively.

- **Be clear and patient.**
  Assist employers to recognize how they will contribute to and benefit from a cooperative education.

  Choose words with care, and in using them, define key terms. Avoid educational jargon and acronyms. State facts objectively and avoid abstractions. By doing this, you will be assured that the employer and you are talking about the same thing.

- **Encourage active participation on the part of the employer.**

  In the interchange of ideas, be very careful to watch for signs of misunderstanding and strive to clarify communication immediately. The questions that the employer will ask usually indicate interest in the program and a desire to ascertain the benefits to be derived for the company.

- **Establish credibility.**

  Persons who attempt to persuade others are most likely to be believed if they know the facts and are motivated to reveal them. When asked for information, supply pertinent facts. Handle all requests and responses pleasantly, professionally, and promptly.

- **Plan persuasion techniques.**

  The coordinator should appreciate the common basis of misunderstanding and take appropriate steps to minimize its effects. Once the basis is determined, the coordinator should be able to find the right appeal to overcome any resistance. One technique of persuasion is the use of humor. If a conversation seems to be slipping into a negative interchange, tactful humor can restore mutual receptiveness. Another technique is to lead the conversation to key facts on which both parties can agree. Allow the employer to share in formulating these mutual agreements.

- **Anticipate negative responses.**

  The coordinator should recognize the areas in which there might be resistance and plan responses in advance. The areas of resistance faced by most coordinators in selling the cooperative method of instruction concern wages, coordinator's duties, paper work involved, legal aspects, student
control, and cooperative program planning. In organizing replies to overcome resistance, the coordinator must remember first to develop areas of common interest and concern. Techniques of persuasion may then be used in supplying information.

Communication is most effective when trust and confidence are present. Establish at the outset that you are a reliable person who reports facts honestly and listens sincerely. Convince the employer that you want to be of service. Previous employer encounters with high school students in part-time jobs may have built up negative feelings toward schools in general. Your priority in this case would be to restore trust.

Finally, refrain from pushing for an immediate positive reaction. Feel your way and work at your own pace. People need time to understand a concept in order to give their best support to it. They may need additional time to accept the cooperative method before they will do more than the minimum activity required. What counts, in the final analysis, is not so much what people are told, but what they will accept.