

MPA NEWS



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Assessing the state of the art in MPA management training programs

In 1999, Graeme Kelleher, former chairman of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, wrote in his classic publication *Guidelines for Marine Protected Areas*:

"The management of MPAs is becoming as sophisticated as that of many commercial organizations, requiring not only technical skills but also a high level of managerial and communication ability. Traditional training for protected area staff has tended to focus on specialist areas, such as marine zoology, but this is no longer adequate: today's MPAs need staff from a wide range of backgrounds with many different skills." (<http://bit.ly/MPAguidelines>)

His words, true then, are even truer now. MPA management has never been more complex. Continual advances both in our scientific understanding of MPAs and in the technologies available (and often required) to manage sites just add to the formidable managerial and communication demands of the job.

Few people enter MPA management with all the skills and knowledge needed to be highly effective. According to experts who spoke with MPA News for this issue, the field remains primarily populated by scientists. Therefore training in a broader set of disciplines is necessary.

In this issue and the next, MPA News talks with MPA management trainers about what represents the state of the art in such training programs. Below, we focus on two global programs: the Coral Reef Management for Sustainable Development program and the International MPA Management Capacity Building Program. (In our next issue, we'll examine a regional MPA training program in the Caribbean and a certification program for MPA professionals in the Western Indian Ocean.)

CASE 1. A new training program to create leaders in coral reef management

The first Coral Reef Management for Sustainable Development program was held this past June in Queensland, Australia. Designed and implemented by Reef Ecologic - a social enterprise established by former Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) directors Paul Marshall and Adam Smith - the program drew 12 marine park managers from the Caribbean, Western Pacific, and Indian Ocean regions. The trainees learned the latest in coral reef research and management. The three-week course was funded by Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade; participation was free of charge for trainees.

A central theme of the program was leadership. All trainees were selected by regional organizations as current or emerging leaders, and were trained in contemporary environmental leadership. Trainees met with nearly 50 experts from GBRMPA, other government agencies, academia, NGOs, and industry over the program's span. Participants received certificates for completing the course, which included development of a follow-up project plan for each trainee.

MPA News: Paul and Adam, your training program covers all the different aspects of effective MPA management, including human resource management, ecology, negotiation, finance, project management, communication, risk, and strategic planning, among others. But it particularly highlights leadership as a core skill. How do you teach leadership?

Paul Marshall: We do it by combining leadership theory and experiential learning in our course. Participants learn about leadership principles, leadership styles, and techniques for being effective as a leader. These are then put into practice through practical exercises and activities, such as teamwork challenges, personal reflection, scenario exercises, and presentations. We have also used the program as a chance for participants to evolve as leaders in the course of the training by involving them in the planning, management, and reporting of the course activities on a day-to-day basis.

In addition, we believe strongly in the power of networks and mentoring relationships. So we bring retired senior managers into the course to spend time with the participants, to be part of the leadership-training activities, and to give the participants a chance to form mentoring relationships with these experienced leaders.

Adam Smith: A passionate leader cares about the people on his or her team (as well as stakeholders, the environment, and doing the best possible job). This means understanding staff members' individual and collective values, interests, and goals. In my view, it is preferable to have a strategic-thinker personality as a leader, complemented by steady, conscientious people. Undertaking personality-profile exercises (such as Myers-Briggs and other tests) within MPA teams can help people have greater understanding of themselves and their peers. We conduct various exercises as part of the program.

MPA News: You've also conducted management trainings within single agencies, involving senior and junior staff at the same time. What do those trainings look like?

Marshall: An important capacity-building area relates to vertically shared knowledge and awareness within organizations. We have been structuring some of our training so that the first day is a broad overview and update on key management issues or topics - such as climate change or MPA planning, for example - delivered to a combination of senior managers and technical staff. That first day is pitched as a knowledge update or master class, making it enticing and accessible to senior staff. By combining senior and junior staff in lectures and discussion sessions, they interact in frank and productive ways that can be very helpful to future relations and organizational coherence. Subsequent days (without the senior managers, who usually have other demands that prevent them from attending longer training) then focus on technical learning, but usually with the confidence that their senior managers will have the context or willingness to engage in new ideas and initiatives that come from the training.

MPA News: In what ways do you see MPA management training evolving over time?

Smith: A combination of training is essential. There needs to be more MPA training in university subjects (sciences and management); in-house training within agencies (including mentoring and coaching); secondments (visits to other MPAs); probably some degree of online instruction; and certification at the end to demonstrate the trainee has grasped the material. Many professions such as engineers or physicians have mandatory professional development and certification, which may be appropriate for MPA management as well. I suggest at least three to five training days a year for all MPA managers, with varying levels of training for executives, site managers, new staff, and so forth.

Marshall: The rapidly expanding range of skills and knowledge areas required for effective MPA management requires a more sophisticated and strategic approach to training. Leadership skills (including management, negotiation, and communication) are required at all levels, as even junior officers can have important leadership responsibilities with community groups or in their interactions with the public. The range of disciplines and technical areas involved in management inevitably requires and justifies specialization, especially for those in technical roles. As Adam said, capacity building at these levels will increasingly need to be delivered in a modular fashion, with online and in-person training content tailored to suit different technical areas (compliance, monitoring and assessment, planning and permissions, and so forth).

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A video on the training program is at <http://bit.ly/reefleaders>

The next courses in Australia for the Coral Reef Management for Sustainable Development program are a 5-day class for global MPA leaders (6-10 June 2016) and a 12-day class for senior MPA leaders (6-18 June 2016). Reef Ecologic can also scope and deliver courses in-country for groups of 10 or more MPA leaders.

CASE 2. The largest and longest-running MPA management training program

For the past 11 years, the US Office of National Marine Sanctuaries has operated a program that now, at any given time, is actively training MPA managers in six regions of the globe. The International MPA Management Capacity Building Program is the largest and longest-running effort of its kind. Over its existence, thousands of individuals from more than 30 countries have gone through its trainings, workshops, and other associated capacity-building activities.

The program is designed to partner with networks of MPAs. Sometimes this represents a cluster of countries (e.g., Coral Triangle, Eastern Tropical Pacific Seascape, or MedPAN South [the non-EU countries of the Mediterranean]). In other cases, the program works with an MPA network in a single country, or a region within a country (e.g., Sea of Cortez in Mexico). The program makes an initial commitment of three years to each partner network, which is usually extended. Over that time period, the program works with a focused group of practitioners from the MPA network. In most cases a large percentage of trainees remain with the program and participate in a succession of capacity-development activities over the entire three-year period. It is a long-term, in-depth process.

Anne Walton heads the program.

MPA News: Anne, you've described your program as a peer-to-peer interactive learning experience with partner networks. How do you start each partnership?

Anne Walton: From the beginning of a new project, our job is to facilitate the identification of priority resource management issues and associated capacity development needs and activities for a given network of MPAs. Because we make a major commitment upfront to conducting a thorough needs assessment (with the assistance of in-country planning teams) and designing the first three years of the program, we integrate measures of success into the design of each regional program.

Having said that, there are certain foundational pieces of our program that we think are important to any success we might hope for. These include our mentor program; strong partnerships with the NGO community working in-country; and focusing on capacity development from both the bottom-up (community-based MPAs) and the top-down (national, provincial, district level government).

MPA News: You've been doing these trainings for 11 years now. How have they changed over time?

Walton: There have been new and emerging issues and management approaches that, when appropriate, we have incorporated into our program. Maybe seven or eight years ago, climate change adaptation was an emerging resource management issue, for example. More recently, in the last six or seven years, with increased awareness of the phenomenal number of new human use activities occurring in the coastal and marine environment, we have been supporting marine spatial planning trainings, workshops, and pilot projects in multiple regions. There are also many new tools, handbooks, and guidebooks that we have partnered on developing and incorporated into our program, such as Conservation International's *Capacity Assessment and Development Planning Guide Series* and WWF's *Stakeholder Engagement Guide*.

I would add, however, that some of the challenges that we identified from the inception of this program still remain. The biggest one is how to move individuals from trainings to successful implementation in the field. We have developed implementation agreements, demonstration projects, incentive programs, and small grants programs, and incorporated them into the design of individual programs. There is no formula, just experimentation from one geography to the next. And sometimes it requires an external examination to understand the obstacles.

Another ongoing issue has been institutionalization of capacity building. It has never been our intention to stay within a region indefinitely: we build an exit strategy into each of our programs. So the question has been how to leave the capacity development opportunities behind, within the framework of a national government, research, or educational institution. Since day one we have worked on institutionalization approaches by building mentor programs, working on sustainable finance mechanisms, building the political will, educating governments, and helping to structure capacity building within local, national or regional institutions. We have had some success in this area, mostly with the support of the NGO community.

MPA News: Where do you see MPA management training headed in the future?

Walton: As much as we have resisted virtual [online] learning, we are realizing that there is a place for it in our program. This doesn't mean that we are going to use technology as a replacement for hands-on learning; rather, we'll use it as a way to keep the momentum going in regard to sharing the learning amongst MPAs. In some ways, technology allows lessons from the classroom to be shared with peers in the field in a timely manner. It also allows for easier continuation of mentoring support as trainees implement what they've learned. So we are starting to incorporate technology as we design each program.

The second area we are now focusing on is problem solving. Much of what an MPA manager's job requires is based on learning how to solve problems. So rather than focusing on particular management models for addressing impacts from climate, fisheries, or tourism development, we focus more now on understanding how to solve such problems in an analytical, sound way.

The third area is learning forums designed specifically to develop the next generation of marine conservation leaders. Our program identifies outstanding individuals with promise of leadership, and those with a strong and committed desire to move into an MPA leadership role. Becoming a leader emerges from building their skills in leading and co-leading teams, facilitating stakeholder and community engagement, collaborating with a broad range of partners, navigating and negotiating conflict, engaging in professional mentorship and peer support, and committing to lifelong individual leadership development. We will be piloting our first 12-day learning forum soon with 19 young professionals in the Mediterranean region through a partnership with WWF, SeaMED, and the Training Network for Monitoring Mediterranean Marine Protected Areas (MMMPA) program.

For more information:

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MPA Management Capacity Building Program: <http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/international/welcome.html>

BOX: Past coverage of MPA management training and capacity-building

- "Perspective: Developing Capacity-Building Programs to Meet the Needs of Regional MPAs", by Anne Walton. MPA News 8:9 (April 2007)
- "Problem Is Shortage of Capacity, Not Revenue Sources: Proposing a New Approach to Financing Protected Areas". MPA News 5:5 (November 2003)
- "Capacity-Building in MPAs: Practitioners Face Challenges, View Opportunities". MPA News 1:6 (March 2000)

We have also featured training programs that focus on MPA enforcement specifically:

- "Building Credible, Effective MPA Enforcement in the Caribbean: An Interview with Jayson Horadam". MPA News 15:3 (November-December 2013)
- "Developing an International Center for Compliance Management in MPAs" (in the article "Advances in MPA Enforcement and Compliance"). MPA News 14:5 (March-April 2013)

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