

USGS Continuous Learning Guidance Focusing on Broad Developmental Opportunities

Employees: “Are we putting enough focus on planning for the future?”
“What is being done to develop employees for future success?”

Supervisors: “How do we invest in training and development (T&D) with limited resources?”

“For the bold new world of the 21st century, every adult American must be able to keep on learning for a lifetime.”

—A U.S. President

So what does “learning for a lifetime” mean?

Gaining new skills and knowledge is imperative in our rapidly changing work environment.

To keep pace and enhance career success and life experiences, we need to broaden our view of T&D to one of continuous learning, as described below.

“Personally, I’m always ready to learn, although I do not always like being taught.”

—Winston Churchill

Continuous learning, as we define it, might have changed his mind.

Continuous learning takes many forms and includes a full range of opportunities including formal classroom training, technology-enabled training (video, audio, Web-based, and CD-ROM), correspondence courses, developmental assignments, mentoring, on-the-job training, conferences, workshops, and details to other positions among others.

“The illiterate will not be the individual who cannot read and write, but the one who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.”

—Alvin Toffler, author of Future Shock

How do we take this philosophy and the concepts of a continuous learning environment and define a USGS philosophy?

The USGS is committed to being a world leader in the natural sciences through scientific excellence and responsiveness to society’s needs.

We are faced with an increasingly broad and complex spectrum of science issues under study, an integrated approach to studying and disseminating scientific information, a growing need for external communication and collaboration, and the associated complex business structures necessary to support a workforce of close to 9,000 employees.

For our workforce to continue to acquire and sustain the necessary skills for excellence and leadership in science, we must foster a learning environment that:

- invests in the development of its people to ensure its world-class status,
- expects employees to take a personal responsibility for their own learning,
- expects managers and supervisors to support the development of employees,
- understands that continuous learning is about embracing a variety of learning experiences,
- ensures that learning opportunities are aligned with the strategic direction of the USGS, and

- recognizes that leadership, supervisory, and managerial skills are essential to maintaining a world-class organization.

How do organizations invest in training and development to set a culture of continuous learning?

A recent poll of industry and government summarized the annual average investment in training and development. An allocation of 2 percent of salary toward T&D is the industry norm.

Type of investment in T&D	High-performing organizations	Government
Number of hours of T&D provided to employees	64	22
Cost of T&D	\$1,574 per person	\$643 per person
Percentage of salary costs invested in T&D	3.2	1.7
Percentage of employees provided with T&D	99	82.7

What is the goal for USGS investment in training and development?

We have some of the best experts in the world and access to excellent developmental opportunities at minimal cost through the USGS, our sister bureaus, DOI, and others.

USGS goal:

- 40 hours of T&D for each permanent full-time employee (FTE),
- 20 hours of which should be invested in leadership, management, and supervisory skills, which are critical to scientific performance.

The goal of 40 hours of annual training challenges the USGS to surpass the average for government and general industry, though not reaching the levels of investment by industry leaders.

Focusing on a time commitment rather than cost allows us to use the full breadth of learning opportunities that constitute continuous learning.

What roles do supervisors, managers, and employees have with respect to continuous learning?

Supervisors and managers:

You are responsible for planning for current and future skill needs by using a wide range of approaches to acquire, develop, and retain skills. Examples include:

- Reviewing your strategic plans and objectives and defining employees' learning needs in relation to organizational goals.
- Setting priorities for training.
- Discussing your workforce and strategic plans with employees and helping them plan for their future through the use of Individual Learning Plan.
- Utilizing a variety of programs and opportunities to promote learning.
- Getting help from the Office of Organizational and Employee Development (OED) in identifying sources for learning.
- Discussing with employees the expected results from each learning experience and providing coaching and feedback.
- Equitably investing a minimum of 40 hours of training per FTE on an annual basis.
- Ensuring that DOI Talent is used as the repository for all employees' T&D records.

Employees:

You should take personal responsibility for your own learning by:

- assessing your skills strengths and gaps,
- preparing an Individual Learning Plan, setting time goals for yourself, and defining the steps to meet your career goals,
- seeking out T&D assignments,
- reading books, magazines, and journals that address current issues and directions in your field so that you can focus on developing critical skills,
- working with your supervisor to set your learning needs in relation to USGS goals, and
- putting your T&D activities in DOI Talent.

How is training and development tracked and reported?

DOI Talent is the tracking and reporting system used by the USGS (guidance is provided on the DOI Talent website).

- It captures data on individual employee's training records, including all types of continuous learning.
- It provides aggregated reports on total hours, cost, and types of training, which supervisors and managers can use to track their progress toward the 40-hour-per-FTE goal and see how they compare to the industry norm of an investment of 2 percent of salary toward T&D.

When should I plan for training and development?

Employees and supervisors should discuss the necessary skills for success during the next year and into the future as part of the yearly establishment of performance goals.

Supervisors and managers should consider and plan for T&D investments when they submit their annual budgets.