

Session Type: Workshop

Session Title: Critical Skills for the Early Career Professional

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Statement of Purpose: The purpose of this workshop is to help early career professionals learn and hone skills that are not often taught as part of undergraduate or graduate training.

Session Abstract: This workshop will focus on developing skills that are necessary for finding and securing jobs in the wildlife field, and then being an outstanding employee. Some skills can be learned on the fly, but others are difficult to learn and sometimes are not adequately developed early in a person's career. This workshop will have four sessions including meeting facilitation/consensus building, relationship building (i.e., networking), finding and securing funding for projects, and project and risk management. These are all topics that an early career professional is likely to encounter early in her/his career, but they are not typically part of undergraduate or graduate training. Each session will include a presentation by a wildlife professional with strong skills in that area, plus a hands-on portion where participants can practice and engage with the skills.

Session Description: This workshop will focus on skills that are necessary for finding and securing jobs in the wildlife field, and then being an outstanding employee. Some skills can be learned on the fly, but others are difficult to learn and sometimes are not adequately developed early in a person's career. The sections within this workshop will be used to introduce participants to key concepts and allow them an opportunity to practice important skills. Because this is the first workshop of its kind, we are including multiple topics to better address the needs of multiple people. These topics were presented to our membership and they were received with enthusiasm. An additional benefit of having multiple topics of relevance to ECPs and others is that the most popular or more intensive topics can be developed into their own workshops in the future. While we acknowledge that each of these sessions could be an entire workshop on its own, our hope is that this workshop format will set participants on the right path to learning and developing these skills.

1. Meeting facilitation/Consensus building: 2 hours

a) Many wildlife professionals will be in charge of organizing and facilitating meetings for colleagues as well as diverse stakeholders. While this skill may come naturally to some, there have been books written about the topic and experts are hired to provide training to meeting facilitators. Developing this skill takes time, but there are some common tips and tricks that can help facilitation and consensus building go more smoothly, such as how to handle a hostile audience and how to ensure that all voices are being adequately heard.

b) This session of the workshop will include hands-on exercises to allow participants to understand the skills presented. Role-playing is the typical activity for developing facilitation skills.

c) Suggested speaker: Steve Riley, South Team Regional Director for Pheasants Forever

2. Relationship building (i.e., networking): 2 hours

a) Networking is a dreaded and misunderstood activity by many in the wildlife field, especially when we would rather be out in the field or with our data. Conferences can be especially nerve-racking because many established professionals are enjoying conversations with colleagues only seen once a year, making it difficult for an early career professional to network. This portion of the workshop will focus on how to engage in purposeful conversations with colleagues, how to maintain a network of useful contacts, and how to activate that network to make it work for you. A focus of this session will be on how to communicate effectively, as building an effective relationship relies on effective communication.

b) Participants will have an opportunity to practice networking with each other and provide feedback on what works well and what doesn't.

c) Suggested speakers: Nicola Koper, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB; Christopher Rustay from Playa Lakes Joint Venture.

3. Finding and securing funding for projects: 2 hours

a) Finding and securing funding for projects is becoming more important with limited government funding for wildlife-related work. More and more often, employees of agencies and NGOs and those in academia are being asked to find funding for their important work. Sometimes their own employment may depend on securing outside funding, and demonstrated success in this job task will likely make job seekers more competitive.

b) Participants will have the opportunity to review and critique grant proposals from different funding agencies to see what works and what doesn't.

c) Suggested speaker: Kris Boyd, Development Executive

4. Project and risk management: 2 hours

a) Many early career professional are responsible for managing multi-faceted projects and their budgets and staff. While many ECPs have some experience in managing smaller projects, they may not know what is needed to successfully manage a large-scale project while maintaining a minimal level of risk.

b) Participants will have the opportunity review different project and risk management strategies and engage in discussion on how to best manage different projects.

c) Suggested speakers: Andrew Rayburn, River Partners; Karie Decker, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission