

INTERNATIONAL MARINE ANIMAL TRAINERS ASSOCIATION

Guidelines for Accreditation of Facility Animal Trainer Development Programs

- I. STAFF TRAINING MANUAL. Facilities must have a written Staff Training Manual which includes the following information:
- a. Policy – A description of the organization’s view of the animal training program, the training program’s role in the organization, and the responsibilities of leadership and management in connection with the program. The facility’s policy on its animal training program should include a description of the focus of the program, the facility’s philosophy on animal training, its application of animal training, its statements of animal care and treatment principles, and facility management’s responsibility and accountability for the program.
 - b. Behavior Development and Management Plan – A description of the animal training program and its objectives, methods of accomplishment and success criteria. The Behavior Development and Management Plan should address training oversight, standard and emergency procedures, and record-keeping, including animal training decision authority, categorized lists of behavior goals and objectives, representative animal training plans for key individual behaviors, criteria for measuring success of animal training plans, schedule of frequency to maintain criteria, and plans to address aggressive or potentially dangerous animals.
 - c. Staff Responsibilities and Advancement Policies – A generalized description of the facility’s staff positions, including proficiency requirements, qualifications, animal training responsibilities for each position, and the facility’s approach to staff advancement.
- II. TEACHING PROCESS. Facilities must have a process in place for teaching learning and conditioning theory to entry-level trainers and must have an animal training staff appropriately sized to meet its training program requirements. The trainer development program and the staff should be under the direction of an experienced and qualified animal trainer. It is suggested that the individual directing the staff and the program have a minimum of three (3) years of training experience, recognizing that years of experience do not alone indicate skill or knowledge. The individual must also possess the supervisory skills to organize and manage the trainer development program. While facilities of different sizes may tailor their educational programs to fit their specific needs, where reasonable and appropriate, facilities should utilize the following suggested methods for teaching new employees learning and conditioning theory:
- a. Seminars – Guest speakers or lectures by more experienced staff on a regular basis to expose staff to new ideas and introduce new concepts.
 - b. Self-study program – A self-study program which directs staff to reading material and relevant information.

- c. In-house classes – A series of classes or coursework for teaching learning theory to staff.
- d. Outside courses – University or other courses related to animal training and behavior.
- e. Mentoring program – Experienced employees paired with new employees to teach job responsibilities in accordance with a well-developed, supervisor approved, plan for introducing concepts and practical applications to staff.
- f. Continuing education – Opportunities such as research projects, field work, conferences, trainer exchanges or internships for employees with knowledge of basic conditioning theories.

Facilities may choose to hire only experienced trainers in lieu of operating a teaching program for teaching conditioning theory to inexperienced staff. In such cases, new hires must possess the proficiency requirements and qualifications for the position as set forth in the facility's Staff Responsibilities and Advancement Policies.

III. EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS. Facilities must make the Staff Training Manual and related materials available to all staff, including a description of how the materials are used and implemented at the facility. The materials may be in electronic media or other forms of information sharing, provided staff have access to the materials as needed. Where reasonable and appropriate, facilities should provide the following types of materials in connection with their trainer development program:

- a. Third-party manuals or books – Materials or books written for another program or designed for another purpose utilized in accordance with the facility's written description of how the materials are incorporated into and used by the facility's trainer development program.
- b. Collection of articles – a collection of articles with a description of how each article pertains to the facility's trainer development program.
- c. Required reading list – a required reading list of books and/or articles based on staff position with a description of how the information pertains to the facility's trainer development program.
- d. Videos – a collection of videos, or a list of available videos, recommended for trainers to view with a description of how each video pertains to the facility's trainer development program.
- e. Glossary – an approved list of terms or glossary from a recognized source which facilitates communication and understanding between trainers.
- f. Library – additional reading materials in a library or other dedicated space accessible to training staff.
- g. Electronic media – Websites, Internet discussion groups and other emerging forms of media may be utilized to meet the criteria above or to supplement the facility's trainer development program as appropriate.

IV. TESTING. Facilities must have a process for testing trainers' knowledge and understanding of learning and conditioning theory and the facility's training policies. While testing may be formal or informal and may be administered in a variety of formats, the testing procedures must be applied such that the employee is able to use the results to

recognize ways of improving knowledge and ultimately performance. Tests must be administered, conducted or designed by a supervisor or staff member with proven knowledge and expertise in the subject matter being tested.

- V. HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE. Recognizing that timing of staff introduction to animals will vary depending on the experience of staff and the species of animals involved, facilities must provide trainers with hands-on experience to enable trainers to apply the knowledge acquired via the trainer development program in accordance with established guidelines. Novice trainers must eventually have opportunities to maintain behavior and train new behavior. Hands-on experience and opportunities should be provided in concert with a mechanism for feedback and guidance from more experienced trainers.
- VI. EVALUATIONS. Facilities must have a mechanism for evaluating trainers' skill levels on a regular basis. Individual evaluations should include observations of a trainer's handling of the animal, use of cues, use of reinforcement, knowledge of criteria, and overall application of conditioning principles as outlined in the facility's Staff Training Manual. Evaluations must be conducted, developed, or overseen by a supervisor or staff member with a proven knowledge and understanding of the evaluation criteria.
- VII. CRITERIA FOR ADVANCEMENT. Facilities must have an understandable criteria for advancement within the organization. The criteria for advancement of a trainer should be based in part on factors in these Guidelines and should be outlined in the facility's Staff Training Manual.