

NOTES FOR TRAINERS

As explained in the introduction, this manual can be used in three possible ways:

- as a teaching guide for trainers running courses for public officials responsible for handling information requests.
- as a learning tool by such officials - in other words they can work through the manual on their own.
- as a reference tool by officials who have already gone through a training course.

We suggested that, ideally, officials should have a chance to work through the manual *before* attending a workshop. This would minimise the amount of information that the trainer has to convey. It would allow the workshop to focus instead on any points where there was disagreement or lack of clarity, as well as on developing and practising the skills required for handling information requests.

How adults learn

There are many different theories about how people - in this case adults - learn. The conclusion of many of them, perhaps none too helpfully, is that people learn in many different ways.

However, it is possible to be rather more precise than that. Most adult learning approaches are participatory. That is, they assume that people are most likely to learn by **doing**, rather than simply reading, listening or watching.

Here is one interpretation of how much information people retain using different learning methods:

- | | |
|------------------------|-----|
| • Reading only | 10% |
| • Hearing only | 20% |
| • Seeing | 30% |
| • Seeing and hearing | 50% |
| • Saying and repeating | 80% |
| • Saying and doing | 90% |

The exact percentages may be difficult to prove, but there is a general consensus among adult trainers that people will remember very much more of what they learn if they are active in the learning process.

Hence it is essential that this manual be used as an aid for preparing participatory learning workshops.

There are various other elements that are common to different pedagogical theories, which it is important to bear in mind when preparing a workshop:¹

Motivation: learners increase their effort if they have a need or desire to learn. You can help this by making sure that the content of the workshop is relevant to the learners' day-to-day practice.

Individual differences: people learn at different rates and in different ways. Teaching methods should take account of this. We recognise the difficulty of doing so in a short workshop, but the use of individual and small group work in the suggested agenda is aimed at meeting this need.

Learning objectives: learners have a better chance of success when they are clear about what it is they are trying to learn. We have set out some general learning objectives in the Introduction to this manual. Trainers should always seek learners' views about what they expect to get out of the workshop at the very beginning.

Organisation of content: learning is easier when what is to be learned is organised into meaningful sequences. We have tried to do this with the organisation of this manual, which is roughly the same as the sequence that workshops will follow. Be prepared to adjust the sequence if that would be helpful for learners in your country.

Emotions: learning involves the emotion as well as the intellect. Emotional attitudes can interfere with learning or increase motivation. A moderate amount of anxiety or challenges will motivate most learners. Excessive anxiety interferes with learning. Try to ensure that learning takes place in a comfortable and supportive environment.

Participation: as we have seen, learners are more likely to retain information if they are active while they learn.

Feedback and reinforcement: learning is increased when individuals are periodically informed of their progress. Learning is motivated by success.

Practice, repetition and application: it is rare for anything to be learned properly with only one exposure. There is complete understanding on the part of the learner only when they are able to apply or transfer what has been learned to a new problem or situation. Sufficient time should be allowed to work through each new skill or concept, applying it to different examples or situations.

¹ This list of headings is drawn from the Facilitator's Information Booklet accompanying the BRIDGE Project (Building Resources in Democracy, Governance and Elections), produced by International IDEA, the Australian Electoral Commission and the United Nations.

Using the manual to run a workshop

Below there is an agenda for a two-day workshop based upon the learning objectives and pedagogic content of this manual. Of course, this agenda can be varied according to the experience of the workshop participants, the exact learning objectives that you have set and any other considerations. However, we would suggest that workshop trainers do not stray too far from the outline agenda that we have proposed.

You will see that the workshop breaks down in the same way as the manual itself, with the first day devoted to discussion of the general principles of freedom of information and the second day to the more practical demands of processing requests for information. You may decide that there are some officials who are not themselves engaged in handling requests for information, but who could benefit from a general introduction to freedom of information. Such people could be invited to the first day of the workshop only.

Throughout the manual there are highlighted issues for discussion. These are labelled either **Brainstorm** or **Point for discussion**. The difference between the two is that **Brainstorm** points are intended as entry points for discussion of new issues, using the participants' own experience *before* the trainer introduces any new information. This will make the learning process more interactive and participatory, since the group will often discover that much of the information that needs to be conveyed can be drawn from the trainees' own experience, rather than having to be presented by the trainer in a lecture format.

Someone working through this manual could brainstorm simply by writing a list of answers to each question. In a workshop this is what the whole group does. The trainer can ask the group to contribute randomly, calling out their answers, or by going round the room in turn. The advantage of the latter is that it encourages everyone to participate, but it may be less spontaneous than people just shouting out their ideas.

- The aim of brainstorming is to get as many ideas as possible.
- Someone (preferably not the trainer) needs to write these on a flipchart or whiteboard.
- All ideas are recorded - all are of equal worth.
- Keep the tempo fast.

Once the ideas have been recorded they can then be classified, prioritised, discussed or put aside for future discussion.

The other **Points for discussion** are intended to consolidate understanding of information presented by the trainer and to offer trainees the chance to clarify any issues that they have not fully understood.

Some of the points for discussion are presented as case studies (some from real life, some fictitious). You as the trainer may wish to

extend the number of case studies referred to by drawing on experience from your country. You can also offer the workshop participants to offer cases from their own experience for discussion. In addition to the final role play included in this manual, you could act out some of the case studies included in the manual as role plays.

It is clear that in the time available during a two-day workshop, not all these discussion points are likely to be covered. It will be for the trainer to decide what are the most important issues to cover.

Some discussion points can be covered in small group discussions and reported back to the plenary. This will be a useful way of extending the ground that the whole group covers, as well as being a useful way of maintaining interest and active participation throughout the two days.

Small group discussions have several advantages:

- They create variety, including a change of physical position, which will help to stimulate concentration.
- They allow greater participation, since there will be less waiting in turn to speak.
- They encourage reluctant participants who may be nervous about speaking to the whole workshop.
- They allow several different tasks to be completed at the same time.

Groups can be picked randomly. The commonest method is for participants to call out a number. All the 1s go together, all the 2s together and so on. There are a variety of other random methods from matching hair colour to matching the dates on coins in their pockets or purses.

Alternatively, the trainer may feel that it is useful for groups to incorporate different characteristics or experiences (for example, not having all-male or all-female groups). Groups could be selected randomly and then adjusted, or simply chosen by the trainer.

Try to vary the group composition for the different small group activities over the two days.

Set a time for completion of small group work, but do not be afraid to stop earlier if everyone seems to have finished. The trainer should visit each group to make sure that they have all understood the task required. Spend time with the groups if it appears that this will be helpful.

Make sure that each group has a rapporteur - someone who will report its conclusions back to the whole workshop. There must be a full discussion of the groups' reports, so that no one is disadvantaged by not having taken part in a particular small group discussion.

Preparation

The manual is generic in nature. That is to say, it seeks to introduce workshop participants to the general principles of freedom of information and the best practices in the field internationally.

However, to be of practical assistance to information officers and other public officials in carrying out their duties, the workshop training will have to be customised to reflect the realities in the country. In particular, it will have to incorporate a detailed presentation of the national freedom of information law, at least so far as it relates to the handling of information requests.

This will require considerable preparation on the part of trainers. It will not be possible to run a workshop *simply* using this manual and the draft agenda, *without* ensuring that the training team has the knowledge and expertise to address all relevant national issues.

At the end of each chapter, there are trainers' notes. These provide a more detailed breakdown of the agenda for that session. They also offer suggestions for activities for each session. Possible contentious issues are also highlighted - as for example when there are potential contradictions between the international standards that form the basis for this manual and the law of the country concerned.

MODEL AGENDA FOR FREEDOM OF INFORMATION TRAINING WORKSHOP

Day 1

LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND SYLLABUS TO BE COVERED	SUGGESTED AGENDA OF ACTIVITIES
<p>Introduce purpose and objectives of training; Introduce participants; Introduce agenda.</p>	<p>Welcome presentation Ice-breaking exercise. Review of participants' expectations</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>(30 minutes)</i></p>
<p>Introduction to freedom of information (Chapter 1 of manual)</p>	<p>Small group discussions on possible benefits and disadvantages of FOI Report back to plenary Trainer presents basic concepts of FOI</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>(45 minutes)</i></p>
<p>Basic principles underlying FOI laws (Chapter 2)</p>	<p>Trainer introduces nine principles (pp 24-30 of manual). Small group/pairs discussions on each of these followed by presentations back to plenary. Discussion of what existing laws conflict with FOI.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>(120 minutes)</i></p>
<p>Legal framework for freedom of information (Chapter 3)</p>	<p>Brainstorm discussion: why is a FOI law necessary? Presentation by invited national expert on national law.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>(90 minutes)</i></p>
<p>Exceptions to public access to information (Chapter 4)</p>	<p>Brainstorm on issues that could be exceptions Trainer explains three part test and goes through case study in plenary Small group discussion of further case studies, followed by plenary.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>(90 minutes)</i></p>

Day 2

LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND SYLLABUS TO BE COVERED	SUGGESTED AGENDA OF ACTIVITIES
Introduction to day's agenda	Introduction and ice-breaking <i>(15 minutes)</i>
Review of day one	Revision of learning points from day one <i>(30 minutes)</i>
Responsibilities of public bodies (Chapter 5)	Participants describe public bodies that they work for. Brainstorm on what bodies have FOI obligations Participants suggest what procedural tools could be devised to facilitate FOI requests. Suggestions are put into "self-help kit" <i>(60 minutes)</i>
Who are the requesters? (Chapter 6)	Trainer introduces discussion based around different scenarios involving different requesters. <i>(60 minutes)</i>
Processing information requests (Chapter 7)	Introduction by trainer based on: flow chart established local procedure for request handling Role play, followed by plenary review, based on different scenarios. See page 78 for an outline of possible scenarios to use. <i>(120 minutes)</i>
Summing up and evaluation	Plenary discussion and completion of evaluation forms <i>(30 minutes)</i>

GETTING STARTED

As we have indicated, there are trainers' notes on each session at the end of each chapter. These elaborate on the agenda, as well as highlighting any particular issues of difficulty.

The introductory session is of particular importance, since it sets the learning objectives for the whole workshop. It is an opportunity for participants to set out their expectations and for them to get to know each other. The trainer should give particular thought to how to structure this opening session, even though it will probably not last more than half an hour.

This is a suggested way of organising the opening session:

Welcome

Ice-breaking exercise

Mapping experience and knowledge of participants

How much do you know about FOI?

How much experience do you have of training?

How much knowledge of or direct experience do you have of public administration?

Review of participants' expectations

Participants write down on small cards/post it notes what they expect to gain from the training and stick these up on the wall to return to at the end.

Introduction of day's agenda and ground rules

How the manual will be used in this training

We will all try to stick to good time

Switch off mobile phones etc

Ice-breaking exercises are important. The one we suggest involves everyone standing in line, arranging themselves at an imaginary point on a spectrum from zero to infinity, depending on how much experience they have of freedom of information (you can draw a real line on the floor or wall). They then each introduce themselves and say what experience they have.

For training of trainers you can repeat the exercise for training expertise and/or knowledge of the public service.

This exercise is good because it relates directly to the subject matter. There are many others that can be used simply to break the ice. For example, participants can be divided into pairs, have a brief discussion and then introduce each other to the group. Or each person can have a piece of card stuck to their back. Others must write their first impressions of the individual on the card.

None of these exercises is intended to be serious. A good ice-breaker gets everyone relaxed and laughing.

Throughout the workshop it is also useful to have “energisers” - exercises that renew flagging energy at low points such as early afternoon. One suggested exercise is this: The trainer gives one participant a simple outline drawing (a house, tree or cat - something simple and conventional). The participant must not show the others. All participants stand in a line, the one with the drawing at the back. S/he “draws” the picture with a finger on the back of the participant just in front of him or her. The next participant does the same to the next one and so on down the line. The person at the front must draw the picture on a flip chart. Usually it bears no relation to the original. The learning point is the way in which information becomes distorted in transmission, but the main point of the exercise is relaxation and energising.

Reviewing participants’ expectations is important for the reasons that we have already identified. Learners will be motivated and encouraged if they are clear about what they are trying to learn. The trainer can tailor the workshop to the expectations of participants. All expectations should be reviewed at the end to see if they have been fulfilled.

Finally, it is important to set out some ground rules for the workshop. These should come from the participants themselves - they are more likely to be observed that way. The trainer may wish to submit some others for the group’s agreement. Important ground rules would include: not interrupting and respecting others’ points of view, keeping good time and switching off mobile phones.

CHAPTER ONE – NOTES FOR TRAINERS

Sample agenda for first session

1. Plenary brainstorming: What do you think freedom of information means? *10 minutes*
2. Small group discussions on possible benefits and disadvantages of FOI. Each group should report back on 5 points - will have 3 minutes each to report back. *15 minutes*
3. Report back from group discussion. Record all the pros and cons on a flipchart to return to later in the training. *15 minutes*
4. Summarise the concept of FOI - add any benefits that have not been identified. *5 minutes*

This session is not intended as a technical discussion of how freedom of information works, but rather to explore why it is a good thing. Hence there is little information for the trainer to impart. It is better to use brainstorming and group work to allow participants to arrive at their own arguments in favour of freedom of information.

CHAPTER TWO – NOTES FOR TRAINERS

Sample agenda for session 2

1. Trainer briefly introduces nine principles. Principles will be already written up on a flipchart. *10 minutes*
2. Discussion in pairs on how to explain these principles. Each pair takes a couple of principles and prepares a 5 minute presentation on each.
Approx. 30 minutes
3. Presentation/discussion of each principle.
Approx. 60 minutes (depending on number of participants).

It is important that the status of the principles is made clear. These are international standards, reflecting best practice in the field. It is improbable that all the standards will be fully reflected in the national law that the officials are being trained to implement. The standards should be used as a guide to interpret the law in line with the most progressive practice. Where the law contradicts international standards, however, this should be pointed out. It is not, though, the purpose of this training to incite officials to break the law!

One way of making this comparison more concrete would be to return to these nine principles at the end of the first day, after having looked at the national law. Then it can be seen where the law is consistent with these international standards and where it is not.

Particular caution needs to be taken with the concept of whistleblowing. It is most unlikely that protection for whistleblowers will be contained in your national law. This would be a useful introduction to the general ethical obligations of public officials to expose wrongdoing. However, it is important not to give officials the impression that the law protects them in this area if in fact it does not.

CHAPTER THREE - NOTES FOR TRAINERS

sample agenda for session 3

1. Brief introductory comment or brainstorm on why it's necessary to have an FOI law.

10 minutes

2. Presentation by national expert on the national access to information law. *Approx. 60 minutes*

This is the only session of the entire workshop that involves a lengthy presentation. It would be advisable to accompany the presentation with visual material such as wallcharts or a Powerpoint presentation. Visual aids will help the main points to stick.

Trainers might also give consideration to presenting the national law under the same headings as the nine principles in Chapter Two. This will have the effect of clarifying the link between international standards and national law.

CHAPTER FOUR – NOTES FOR TRAINERS

sample agenda for session 4

1. Plenary Brainstorming on issues that could be exceptions. Go back to list of arguments against FOI made in session 1 and add any further exceptions. Then write them up on a flipchart. *10 minutes*
2. Trainer explains three part test. Explain three part test and go through two case studies in plenary. *30 minutes*
3. Small group discussion of further case studies. *20 minutes*
4. Report back and discussion in plenary. *30 minutes*

This is another area where the trainer will have to take great care, since there is likely to be a gap between international standards and the content of the national law. It will have to be made clear that the three-part test constitutes best practice, but that very few national laws actually provide for all three elements of such a test.

A further complication is caused by the existence of classification systems that may, in practice, remove decision-making from the officials who are being trained. It will be the responsibility of the trainer to understand how such a classification system works, as well as being familiar with the operations of any secrets laws that remain in force.

The case studies used are fictitious and can be adapted to suit the country situation, as well as the particular types of request likely to be received by the officials being trained.

CHAPTER FIVE - NOTES FOR TRAINERS

sample agenda for session 5

1. Plenary brainstorming on what are “public bodies” under the national FOI law. *15 minutes*
2. Brief presentation of the six measures listed in the manual which should be undertaken by a public body. The six measures should already be written up on a flipchart. *5 minutes*
3. Small group work to devise tools for implementing the six measures in practice. Each group devises at least one tool relating to the six measures, and can add measures they think are missing. *20 minutes*
4. Presentation of tools and discussion in plenary. *20 minutes*

This could be a very important practical session. The general aim is to give participants an understanding of the positive steps that public bodies should take to implement access to information. More specifically, participants should finish this session with ideas for a series of practical measures that they can take back to their own workplaces and implement.

CHAPTER SIX – NOTES FOR TRAINERS

sample agenda for session 6

1. Introduce session by reflecting on why it is important to discuss requesters with the public officials. Encourage them to empathise with people who might request information and understand why the information might be important to them. *10 minutes*
2. Plenary brainstorming on who might request information under the law. Remind participants who can make a request in the national law. Go back to the list of arguments in favour of freedom of information to stimulate suggestions about who might be requesters of information. *15 minutes*
3. Small group discussion around different scenarios involving different requesters. *15 minutes*
4. Report back from small groups. *20 minutes*

Groups using this manual have had mixed experience with this session. Some found that it was useful; others less so.

The aim was to encourage officials to empathise with people requesting information by understanding the reasons why they might want or need that information. This would make officials more likely to treat requesters sympathetically.

There are points in this chapter that must be covered, in particular the guidelines for handling requesters.

The following list consists of possible requests that could be included in the small groups' discussion as case studies.

Cases to discuss in small groups

1. What was the budget of the District Council for last year?

2. Why I wasn't allowed to attend yesterday's meeting of the District Council, where the case of my husband was discussed. He is a public official who is under investigation for theft.

3. I am writing a study on morality and charity and I want to have: 1. the list of all adopted children during last 2-3 years; 2. the list of their parents (both natural and adoptive).

4. Please give me the list of secret documents held by your District Council.

5. Please give copies of all proceedings of District Council meetings for the last 10 years.

6. I am interested to find economic data about the activities of the company Forward! for years 2001-2003 and its long-term plans. I have approached the head of the company but he will not even listen to my request.

7. What are the results of the medical examination of conscripts from your District Council area?

8. I addressed a complaint to your officials. One month has already passed and they have still not seen me. Please do something.

9. Please give me the list of salaries for staff of the District Council.

10. For many years I have been trying to get my job back (I was discharged). I have assembled a file with all the documentation. Please could I photocopy it here for free.

11. I am an official of the District Council. Please give me a copy of my personal file.

12. Factory "X" produces soap, but in fact as everybody knows also produces gunpowder. Is it true that the storehouse can explode?
13. Please give me the laws on pensions.
14. People say that the reservoirs above the village may overflow, if there is heavy rain, and destroy the village. Give me the documents containing the plan for the reservoirs.
15. I want to see the contingency plan of the District Council in case of war or natural disaster.
16. Everybody knows that one of the candidates to become President of District Council is always in hospital. I want to see his medical file.

CHAPTER SEVEN – NOTES FOR TRAINERS

sample agenda for session 7

1. Presentation and discussion of flow chart. Prepare blown-up version of flow-chart for visual presentation. Bear in mind that the order of the steps described and represented in the flow chart will vary in different national legislation. For example, in the Romanian FOI law Step 5 - registering the request, comes before Step 3 - confirming the responding body holds the information. *40 minutes*

2. Role play of different scenarios of an FOI request, followed by plenary discussion. Introduction to the role play *10 minutes*

Participants divide into three groups and are each given a different scenario involving 2 or 3 characters. Each group discusses the scenario among themselves - up to them whether they want to prepare the outcome or be spontaneous. *15 minutes*

Each group acts out role play in front of everyone and trainers intervene to suggest alternative outcomes. Plenary feedback and discussion after each role play. *65 minutes*

This session will need a considerable amount of preparation to make it applicable to each national context.

The flow chart should be available as a wall chart that will be visible to the entire group. It must be adapted to reflect the procedure used in your country.

In addition, it would be useful to work with any existing forms used to record and respond to information requests, rather than the South African form used as an example in this chapter.

For the role plays there are two basic approaches.

The first is to give each group the basic information about each scenario and allow them to choose what character each will be, as well as deciding how the story evolves. If you adopt this approach,

you might want to have each group act out their scenario twice, reaching different outcomes each time.

You can use the scenarios outlined at the end of the chapter, or other suitable national examples. Alternatively you could use some of the scenarios outlined in the Notes for Trainers for Chapter Six.

The second approach is to work out the scenario in greater detail, assigning roles to each participant and giving them briefing materials. The advantage of this approach is that the trainer has greater control over the learning outcomes. The disadvantage - aside from the extra preparation time - is that there may be a loss of spontaneity in the role play.

On the following pages you will find a scenario for a role play, along with the text of cards to be given to each of the characters. This scenario incorporates the use of an appeal procedure. You may wish to adapt this to your specific country situation.

Whichever method you use, it is important that you conclude with a discussion that draws out the main learning points from the activity.