



Hawkeye Area Council BSA
NYLT Learning Evaluation
Analysis & Recommendations

Overview

The Boy Scouts of America (BSA) is one of the largest youth-serving organizations in the United States, with more than 2.4 million youth participants and nearly one million adult volunteers. The BSA's goal is to train youth in responsible citizenship, character development, and self-reliance through participation in a wide range of outdoor activities, educational programs, and career-oriented programs.

The Scouting program has four specific objectives: character development, leadership development, citizenship training, and personal fitness.

National Youth Leadership Training (NYLT) is an intensive, 6-day leadership experience for Scouting youth. It teaches team building and leadership skills like those found in corporate management training programs. The format of the course is largely experiential – topics are introduced via a short presentation and skills are immediately put to practice in an activity. The course is immersive in that participants are placed into small groups which live and learn and are largely self-led the whole week. This provides constant opportunities to practice their new skills outside of the prescribed activities.

The NYLT curriculum is designed by the BSA's national training group and is delivered by adult and youth volunteers at the local council level. The local council is: Hawkeye Area Council. NYLT teaches a method of giving feedback called "start, stop, continue". Feedback is given in the form of:

- "what should we start doing can help us perform better in the given situation"
- "what are we doing, that we should stop doing, because it is not helpful"
- "what are we doing well, that is helpful, so we should continue doing it"

Analysis

There are two methods of evaluation used at the Hawkeye Area Council NYLT

1. Participants are asked to evaluate the course content and delivery to help improve the course delivery. This type of evaluation maps to Kirkpatrick level 1 and 2.
2. NYLT staff evaluates the participants for their learning and application of course content to help improve course delivery and attempt to understand (if not quantify) the value of NYLT. This type of evaluation maps to Kirkpatrick level 2 and 3.

Evaluations occur both during and at the end of the course. There is currently no post-course evaluation:

- Formative: The participant handbook has a page for each presentation which summarizes the main points, provides a 1-5 scale for general reaction to the presentation, and provides space for notes with a prompt of "How can I use this skill in my home unit".

The reaction rating is intended to help participants later with completing the summative evaluation. The notes may also help with completing the summative evaluation, but that Level 3 information is lost to course organizers because it is never collected from the participants.

- Summative: at the end of the course, participants are provided a course evaluation form which asks them to rate each presentation and activity using the Start / Stop / Continue method. The form asks participants to tell which presentation they thought was the best and why, which they thought could be better and why. It provides a space for "other comments" about the course.

The Start / Stop / Continue method is familiar to Scouts because they learn it and use it during the course. However, those words are being misused on this evaluation. The context provided for Start / Stop / Continue on the course evaluation form is:

1. Start: we should be doing something to make this better
2. Stop: we should stop doing this because it isn't helpful
3. Continue: this works well; keep doing it just like this

Participants are asked to rate each presentation using a number where 1 is Start, 2 is Stop and 3 is Continue.

- The 1-3 enumeration is used to save space on the form. It causes confusion as evidence by the number of evaluations received which have all "1" ratings changed to "3" ratings and vice-versa.
- The Start/Stop/Continue words are being assigned a numeric value as though they are a Likert scale. However, the numeric values have no meaning – there is no "better/worse" relationship between Start, Stop and Continue. A higher score does not correlate to better performance because Stop (2) is not better than Start (1).

- Applying a Start / Stop / Continue method to the presentations as a whole is not relevant – the presentations are prescribed by the syllabus. We are not allowed to “stop” doing a presentation. I don’t even know what it would mean to “start” doing a presentation that we already do.

A rating of Start / Stop / Continue with the context of doing “something” different, is not useful without knowing what should be started, stopped or continued.

The best/worst presentation questions provide little value after the course is over. Most often the responses are about Level 1 issues such as “could not hear presenter”, or “presenter not engaging”. Occasionally, these responses are about content, such as “presentation is boring”. While we cannot change the content, if we know the presentation is boring, we can coach the presenter to be more engaging with his/her subsequent presentations.

Rationale

I propose a new approach to evaluating the NYLT course – an approach based on the purposes and rationales described by the “Four Levels of Training Evaluation” (James D and Wendy Kayser Kirkpatrick, 2016).

To start defining the new approach, we must first consider the reasons for evaluating at all. The Kirkpatrick model identifies 3 major reasons that training programs should be evaluated:

1. Apply lessons-learned toward improving the program itself
2. Maximize transfer of learning to behavior (and results)
3. Demonstrate the value of the training to the organization

The current evaluation methods focus only on the first reason: to improve delivery of the program. A great delivery is important to ensure that participants speak well of the course and tell their peers about the experience they had. This peer-to-peer promotion is crucial to future recruiting. Evaluation helps us to improve the program by identifying opportunities to make delivery of the material better.

The second reason to evaluate is to ensure participants are learning the material and that they will be able to use the new knowledge and skills after they leave the training. This is the real reason for any training – to help people get better at something so they can achieve results that are important to the organization. In the case of NYLT, the desired result is for our participants to be better leaders. Current evaluation methods toward this reason are indirect – first, the “how can I use this skill...” writing prompt in their handbook lets them demonstrate (to themselves) that they understand the material by describing how it can be used in the context of their own life. Second, the entire course is experiential – participants have constant opportunities to demonstrate what they are learning during activities designed to reinforce the lessons. Finally, after the course, we send a letter to the Scout’s leaders and ask them to have a conversation about the experience. The letter gives some guidance on what the leader should expect from the Scout.

The final reason to evaluate is, arguably, the most difficult but the most important. For a business, the value of training might be shown as a measure of the time and expense to attend the training versus the improved productivity of a worker after the training. Evaluating the results achieved against the cost of the training can show that the training is effective and therefore is a good investment of the organizations resources. The current NYLT evaluation approach does nothing toward evaluating the post-training results and thus cannot definitively state that there is value.

Criteria

To guide our evaluation design, consider the four levels of evaluation generally accepted in the training field:

1. Level 1 – Reaction: the “customer satisfaction” level. How much did participants enjoy the session?
2. Level 2 – Learning: to what degree did they learn the material? How confident are they in using it after the training? How committed are they to using it after the training?
3. Level 3 – Behavior: are they willing and able to use their new knowledge and skills after the training? Do they have the necessary support from their organization? Are they actually using the skills and knowledge?
4. Level 4 – Results: are they achieving the desired results by using their new knowledge and skills? How do they know?

LEVEL 4

In designing an evaluation program, begin at the end by defining the desired results and identifying metrics (aka “leading indicators”) used to determine progress toward the results. Level 4 evaluation occurs by observing or measuring the metrics. The desired results of NYLT is the vague goal of developing good youth leaders.

There is currently no Level 4 evaluation to determine if the goals, or results, have been met.

LEVEL 3

Next identify the critical behaviors – the few specific actions, which must be performed properly and consistently to achieve the desired results. Level 3 evaluation occurs by observing or measuring the quantity and quality of these behaviors. In Scout units where the adult leader is familiar with NYLT, or has attended Wood Badge, the leader may have the knowledge and skills to support the Scout in using her/his NYLT skills but currently has no specific instruction for doing so.

There is currently no list of critical behaviors and there is no one tasked with checking that the critical behaviors are being performed after the training.

Defining Level 3 evaluation also includes identifying and defining post-training support and resources (sometimes called “required drivers”) to help improve the quality and quantity of critical behaviors. These resources might include job aids such as check lists or memory tricks.

They might also include material for someone else (i.e. the Scout's adult leaders) to help coach the participant.

The participant handbook is a good Level 3 resource that has several job aids for the Scouts to reference after the course.

There is currently no support material to guide the unit leader in helping the Scouts apply their NYLT skills.

LEVEL 2

Evaluation of learning, Level 2, is typically done by testing in some manner. Scouting is experiential and hands-on. We do not want it to feel like school so oral or written tests (or quizzes) are nearly always a bad idea. However, casual conversations with a participant can reveal much about their understanding of the material. Simple observation of participants during the various activities and day-to-day interactions can provide great insight not only to their understanding of a given topic but also their grasp of how the skills work together in different contexts.

NYLT staff has many conversations with participants, and we observe them during activities, however the observations and conversations are not captured or otherwise used to determine the extent of learning that is occurring.

To be most effective, there must be a process for remediation when it has been determined that a participant (or group of participants) has not learned the material sufficiently.

There is no method or mechanism for remediation if the desired level of learning has not occurred.

The group project "Quest for the meaning of leadership" provides opportunity for the teams to demonstrate their grasp of the topic.

The group is given an instruction that every member must contribute to the creating the presentation and every member must take part in delivering the presentation. There is no mechanism to determine at what level each member contributed and thus no way to evaluate an individual member's level of understanding.

LEVEL 1

Evaluation at Level 1 is the easiest, and potentially least useful, information to gather. Simply asking participants how they are enjoying their experience and what can be improved yields much information. In practice, most of the information gleaned from this level of evaluation is superficial and related to environment (it's too cold), content (the topic is boring) or content delivery (I can't hear the presenter). That doesn't mean that it has no value – only that its value needs to be considered relative to the other levels and other information gathered.

Additionally, information gathered at Level 1 is often time-sensitive – it should be collected and reviewed immediately to have value.

There is currently some attempt to gather Level 1 information but it is not done at a time, nor in a manner, when it can be most useful.

Goals

There are a few desired results for this new approach to evaluation. The plan should:

- a) Gather more and better information about the course delivery to help improve future courses
- b) Provide resources to help units support their Scouts in applying NYLT skills after the course
- c) Help unit leaders identify and quantify the improvements in their Scouts leadership, leading to increased NYLT support from the units

Proposal

With the preceding as context and justification, here is my proposal for a new evaluation plan for the Hawkeye Area Council NYLT course. This plan aims to address the shortcomings identified with the current evaluation methods by:

- Perform Level 1 type evaluations (“smile sheets”) formatively and, when possible, correct shortcomings immediately. This not only improves the program but also to models to the participants the leadership skill of receiving and applying feedback (a topic of the course itself)
- Capture Level 2 type information (learning/understanding) from both staff observations/conversations and from participant self-assessments. These are also done formatively so that additional explanation or coaching can be done if necessary.
- Identify opportunities for further discussions and additional coaching when Level 2 evaluations indicate an individual or group has not learned the material well
- Develop a list of Level 3 critical behaviors with examples of how the Scout might perform them and how the unit leader might recognize or evaluate them.
- Evaluate critical behaviors during the course by observing participants in their patrol settings and activities. Create a checklist to help NYLT staff record their observations about individual Scouts.
- Expand the NYLT participant handbook to include more/better post-training support materials for the Scouts.
- Define and create a post-training support package for unit leaders which includes information about what the Scout learned and suggestions for how the unit leaders can support and reinforce those skills.
- There is no proposal made at this time with regard to evaluating NYLT at Level 4. The desired results – “developing good leaders” – are vague and subjective. The effort to define evaluation at this level is quite high and the incremental benefit (over Level 3 evaluation) is quite low.

This plan is being developed for an existing training curriculum that we cannot modify. It will be implemented by the volunteer staff of the training event, who have no background in training or evaluation. There is no particular understanding or buy-in as to the value of improving our evaluation. Thus – this must be achieved with the very minimum of overhead during delivery of the course.

Implementation

Start at the end and work backwards. Tasks for each level are what is necessary to achieve the next level.

Level 4 (results)

Level 4 evaluation is about achieving results for the organization. The desired results for NYLT is along the lines of “developing good leaders”. In the abstract, this can be defined by the words in the BSA Vision and Mission statements.

Because this result is so abstract and the evidence of it is so subjective, and in the interest of time and effort, we’re not going to attempt to evaluate the organizational results of NYLT at this time.

Level 3 (behavior)

Level 3 evaluations are performed by the NYLT staff during the course and by the Scout’s unit leader(s) after the course. The main part of our Level 3 effort is to help Scouts use their new skills after NYLT. We want to get them thinking about how to use those skills in their own situations and we want to create the post-training support package to help the unit leaders support the Scouts.

- ❖ Create a new end-of-course evaluation form
 - ❑ Focus on “taking it home” – what are things they want to put into action right away
 - ❑ Ask them to identify some challenges that NYLT skills will help them overcome
 - ❑ Ask for obstacles they anticipate in using NYLT skills and what can help overcome the obstacles
- ❖ Create a list of actions, behaviors and attributes which, when performed accurately and consistently, demonstrate that the Scout is applying the knowledge and skills learned in NYLT.
- ❖ Create a job aid for unit leaders describing what the Scout has learned and how the unit leader can support the Scout in applying his/her new skills
- ❖ Formalize the “Scoutmaster Letter”
 - ❑ Capture the letter somewhere so it is archived with the course materials
 - ❑ Send the job aids to the unit leader with the Scout’s “NYLT Trained” patch and a letter of explanation.
 - ❑ Possibly include some of the anticipated obstacles mentioned by the Scout, and offer suggestions how the unit leader can help avoid/overcome these

Level 2 (learning)

Level 2 evaluations are done constantly throughout the course. They come indirectly through observation of, and conversation with, participants during the normal course of the event.

- ❖ Update and expand mealtime discussion prompts list. Provide information to staff about what we are trying to evaluate with the questions. Provide guidance to staff on how we hope the participants will respond and how we can help coach them if necessary.
 - ❑ Add seeds, and rearrange existing seeds, so that early in the week the seeds focus on what participants hope to experience, what they hope to learn, how they hope to use the skills and what challenges they face in their unit.
 - ❑ Later in the week, the seeds should focus on what they have experienced, what they have learned, what challenges they have in their unit that they can now address.
 - ❑ Later in the week, have seeds that ask about obstacles they anticipate as they try to use their new skills and what would help them overcome those obstacles.
 - ❑ Provide information to staff about when/how to use these seeds. Encourage them to make notes early in the week about what challenges participants mention. Later in the week staff can revisit the challenges participants mentioned and ask how they can use their new skills to address the challenges.
- ❖ Create a checklist of key knowledge and skills to look for from participants.
 - ❑ Organize the list by course day to identify what material has been covered at a given point in the course
 - ❑ Add the list to the participant handbook for their reference
 - ❑ Format the list to go in the staff pocket notebook (see next item)
 - ❑ Format the list for use by unit leaders via the Level 3 post-course support package
 - ❑ Have demonstration of key knowledge and/or use of key skills be a criteria for some of the daily "shout out" awards
- ❖ Provide a pocket notebook and pencil to each staff and encourage them to capture their thoughts throughout the week.
 - ❑ Caution staff to be honest but friendly, courteous and kind with their notes – do not write anything they would not want someone else to read
 - ❑ Caution staff about keeping their notebook private – do not leave it lying around where others may read it
 - ❑ Ask them to capture observations and impressions of individual participants that help show if the participant is understanding the content. Helps for coaching in the present and staff selection in the future.
 - ❑ Incorporate discussion of individual's progress to daily staff meetings – both to gain the insight and to demonstrate to the staff the value of capturing the information.
- ❖ Create a form for the course director to consolidate per-participant observations for use in evaluating staff for future courses.
 - ❑ Use NAYLE/PLC evaluation form as basis

Level 1 (reaction)

All level 1 evaluation is performed “in real time” – that is, during and immediately after each content module. This resolution of evaluation provides insight that can allow immediate adjustments. This resolution of evaluation could also provide a lot of noise – feedback about trivial items that would have been forgotten or deemed not important if evaluations were done at a later time.

- ❖ Provide a mechanism for participants to make suggestions or requests at any time. Review the suggestions immediately. Address issues as immediately as possible.
 - ❑ Provide “Suggestion / Request” cards on each patrol table and a place to put them. This provides a mechanism for giving feedback asynchronously – i.e. for issues unrelated to the current context, for issues that come to mind at a later time or for issues that are not appropriate to be addressed publicly.
 - ❑ Provide instruction to use these cards for things that can actually be improved (i.e. not the weather) and things that are not about a specific presentation. Can also be used to call out positive things (i.e. “atta boys”)
- ❖ Provide a mechanism for participants to evaluate each presentation and activity immediately. Share feedback with presenters/facilitators and coach them on how to apply the feedback
 - ❑ Provide “Start / Stop / Continue” cards on each patrol table and a place to put them

Use 3x5 cards for Suggestion/Request and Start/Stop/Continue cards.

- ❑ *Use variety of colors just to “mix it up”, any color card can be used for any purpose*
- ❑ *Introduce comment/request cards right away*
- ❑ *Introduce S/S/C cards after it is introduced at D2 patrol meeting*
- ❑ *Create an instruction sheet (laminated for reuse?) reminding Scouts to include the presentation/presenter info for S/S/C, tape instruction sheet to patrol table*