



New Training Program for the Tools of the Species Conservation Toolkit Initiative

Participant list

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Summary

Sara Sullivan gave an overview of the SCTI training philosophy. We talked about the mission and vision of SCTI, and how it fits in with CPSG and the community of conservation planning overall. The training program will support efficient tool use by providing essential technical training, largely addressing competencies (skills and knowledge) at the level of the individual. Toolkit users are expected to have sufficient conceptual background, but SCTI training will provide links to already existing resources for users looking to strengthen their understanding of fundamental concepts. SCTI will evaluate who users are, what their needs and competencies are, and the best mode or modes of delivery for training materials. Sara described SCTI's efforts to identify various audiences within its expansive user base and to assess user competencies and needs. The SCTI team has prioritized which software tools our training program will address first. Sara is working to outline the training program plan for the first two years as well as longer-term training program objectives, vision, and mission.

There was a group discussion about the training program scope (does it make sense in relation to the SCTI mission?) and awareness of SCTI within the IUCN/conservation community.

Are the SCTI vision and mission internally focused, to keep us on track, or are they designed to engage the wider community? We have developed them to help us stay focused and to make it clear to others what we will be doing. There was a suggestion that we might develop a shorter vision or mantra to help others in the community understand what we do and to engage them.

Our audience is likely to have a range of computer skills, disciplinary backgrounds, and needs. Targeting such group (SG chairs) as our first training audience may help with publicizing and spreading awareness or knowledge of how our tools might benefit the community and encourage community buy-in for training program development as the chairs could pass the information to the rest of their group. Regional resource centers may also be a good first target audience.

There was some discussion about making sure all the taxonomic Specialist Groups would be aware of resources such as SCTI and how we might reach out to them or make sure they have tools and protocols needed for conservation planning. SGs (especially new ones) may not be aware of advisory services that

exist (like SCTI or CPSG planning guidance), and it might be helpful to reach out to them to let them know about technical tools or other training, perhaps through a liaison in the SSC office like Rachel Hoffmann. Communication is key. It may be useful to have a coordinator or liaison to help SGs take advantage of expertise and resources within the SSC, or a welcome package for new chairs giving them list of opportunities and facilities, and names of people who can help them find resources (or assign a 'planning officer' to each SG to help them coordinate planning resources). SCTI could send a representative to SG meetings to bring them up to speed on our toolkit.

There are also other groups who may benefit from SCTI tools and should possibly be targeted for training. These groups may be using the tools for other purposes than conservation planning and therefore may have different needs than the CPSG or SSC audience. To test training modules, it may be useful to create a focus group with a range of skills, needs, and experience to make sure training is relevant to all. We may also want to cultivate future users by targeting training or outreach to universities. SCTI does have academic members of our advisory group who may be able to help with this. Large global conferences may help us reach others beyond SG members; SCTI could present training there or give an overview of the toolkit.

Sara gave an introduction to online training modules that SCTI has begun developing. It is important to get feedback to make sure the training is actually impacting the users' ability to carry out their objectives (planning, research, etc.). Different training platforms (online, in person, blended, self-paced and interpersonal) may be appropriate for addressing different learning objectives and audiences. To start with, Sara has developed some test modules using Articulate Storyline, both self-paced and video style. She demonstrated these modules to get feedback from workshop attendees.

Feedback on the demo: For Europeans, the word 'project' sounds large and perhaps intimidating. Consider replacing with 'analysis' (re: PMx project). There was also a preference for talking directly to users with the materials (i.e., "You will be able to..." instead of "Learners will be able to..."). Icons may not translate across all cultures; important to consider when choosing graphics or designing materials. It will be some time before SCTI is able to get the training modules translated, so we have attempted to keep language simple and straightforward and to use graphics or icons to aid understanding. Suggestion to create random questions in quizzes to increase re-usability. It might be possible to have various CPSG members record explanations in their own language which could be attached to the online module files to provide further language support initially. SCTI should consider providing a list of most urgently needed language translations. SCTI should consider providing certificates for training 'graduates'. Some types of users, like veterinarians, are required to complete a certain number of job-related training hours annually. A certificate or partnership with an organization that could provide credits could help these users have more institutional support to take the training.

There was further discussion about structure or strategy of training. Training might take the form of modular units that could go in any order as needed or as a structured course that users would follow in a linear order. The modular method might work better for something like PMx, which can be broken down in to various sections, while a structured course might work better for Outbreak, which users work through in a certain order and must complete all sections. It might be helpful to have a message board

or forum for users to support each other, including posting of links to references or further info. There was a suggestion to have a more thorough course and shorter modular refreshers for each software item, to make the training relevant for users of different experience levels. Manuals should be updated and created for tools that don't have them (i.e., Outbreak). In-context help, such as videos, would be helpful as refresher for users who have had previous training and in addition to the manuals. SCTI might consider creating a place for people to make suggestions for areas of the manual that need updates or further details. Would be nice to embed examples and case studies into the software itself (maybe use case studies from Second Nature) or into the training materials. Case studies with real-world datasets that have different pop sizes or other variant scenarios will help make the training relatable. Sample datasets for users to analyze would also be helpful.

The final topic of the working group was communication. SCTI will be updating our website and would like feedback on how to make it more user-friendly or functional. Resources have been directed toward tool development and maintenance, and SCTI is looking for a way to get resources for web development. We also need user feedback on whether training materials should be hosted on a website, through a Learning Management System (LMS), distributed on USB stick, etc. (or a combination). There was a suggestion that we might want to have at least some paper materials for sharing at events and conferences. It was also suggested that the software downloads and learning materials should be hosted at the same site, and the users should register when they download either type of thing. Then they can be contacted with software updates or to assess training needs. The user community needs to feel connected and supported so they will be empowered to use the tools. A symposium for donors to help them understand that SCTI is about real-world, relatable projects, so it is not just seen as technical 'numbers', would help people to feel connected and want to support SCTI's training efforts. Email updates with more frequent information on updates, bug fixes, etc. can also help create a sense of connection and community. Not all members of the community are yet aware of what the tools do, what data are needed and outputs are created. Specialist Group chairs could help communicate, and make their members aware of this information. SCTI is considering creating a short video clip for each software tool to introduce it and provide a relatable example. These could be distributed to SG chairs or others. A webinar might also be a good way to quickly increase awareness to a broad or diverse group.